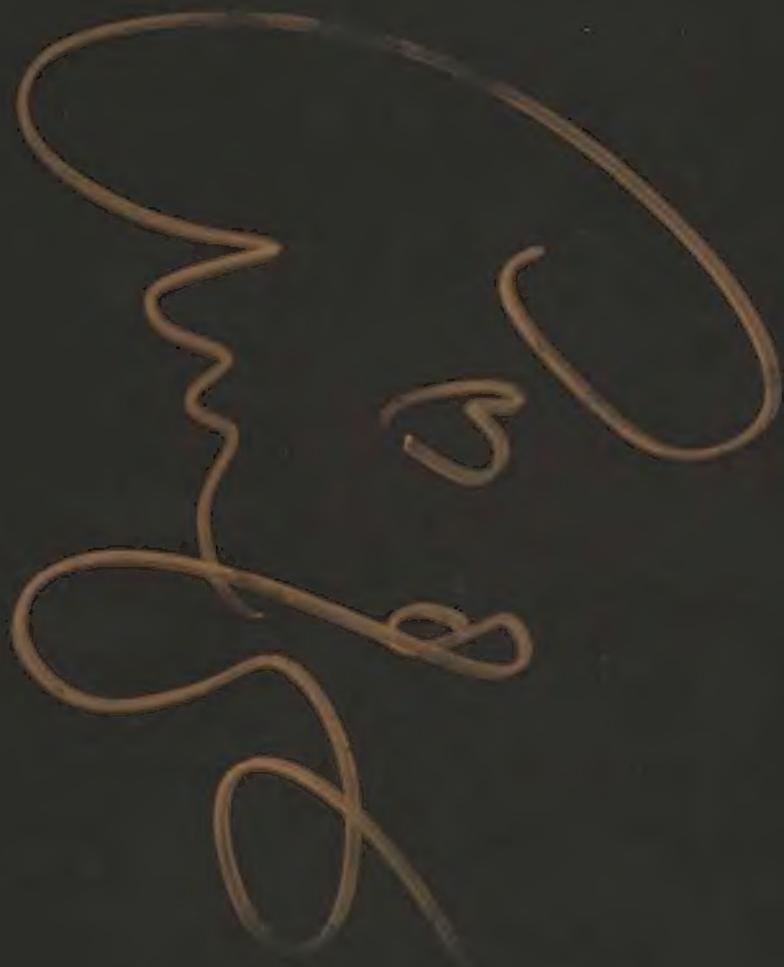


# GINGER WILDHEART

BY



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# SONGS & WORDS

By Ginger Wildheart

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# SONGS & WORDS

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Originally the foreword to this book  
was to be written by Lemmy.

He was reading this story when he died.  
In the wake of this sudden and incalculable loss  
there will be no foreword.

To be honest, I can't even think of anyone  
I would approach in the absence  
of this truly great man.

To Lemmy, my spirit animal.

Ginger x

PROLOGUE AKIMBO A-GO-GO:  
DON'T BE HAPPY...  
JUST WORRY

Where I will be  
fired from

The Quireboys,  
receive wisdom from  
Sharon Osbourne,  
contemplate suicide,  
discover crack,  
see a UFO, form  
The Wildhearts  
and sign a major  
record deal.



## TURNING AMERICAN

Just prior to being unceremoniously jettisoned from The Quireboys (for 'bad behaviour, apparently'), I enjoyed dreaming about a fantasy punk/rock/pop band. One with huge and heavy thrash riffs like early Metallica and choruses that sounded like Cheap Trick. 'Turning American' was the song that would run through my head during that daydream. People have asked if the song was actually written about The Quireboys. I always reply in the negative. But it was written because of them - or as a result of my time in their employ. When I was eventually sacked, I was already armed with the blueprint of a band no-one around had yet bothered to form. It was a very generic time for rock music so standing away from the norm didn't take too much effort.

I was called to Sharon Osbourne's office to be handed my marching orders (a move that I suspect surprised Sharon as much as me). Despite the experience, I both learned an important lesson and was offered some sage advice.

The lesson was thanks to The Quireboys' guitarist. He casually looked out of a window - with his back facing me - while I was told that my services were no longer required. I made a mental note to never fire a musician without looking them directly in the eye. And sacking musicians was something I'd find myself doing plenty in the coming years. If I had enough respect to hire them in the first place, I'd show the same respect in firing them.

The advice came from Sharon herself. On my way out of the door, she collared me and offered me this: "Ginger, don't be an arsehole. Anyone can be an arsehole!" Clearly Sharon is an ace at spotting potential - even if invisible to all around - when she sees it.

Nevertheless crestfallen (The Quireboys being my intended ticket to the stars), I walked to the nearest off-licence to buy a bottle of Jack Daniel's. By the time I'd reached Seven Sisters station - location of my squat - I'd sought such heavy comfort in the bottle that I'd finished most of its contents. Unsteady and stumbling in my cowboy boots, I tumbled over and down the station stairs, clutching onto what was left of my whiskey. As I rolled, the bottle felt like my last possession in the world. I promised myself that when I finally reached the bottom that if the bottle smashed I'd take the broken bottle neck and slice my wrists. If not, I'd immediately go about forming my fantasy Metallica/Cheap Trick band.

In a crumpled heap on the cold floor - through tears of hopeless frustration - inspection of the bottle revealed it to be fully intact. I guess it was at this point that The Wildhearts were born. As a creative outlet? As a bid for survival? Perhaps both. A combination of the two would certainly become a mantra for the band and my following career.

## NOTHING EVER CHANGES BUT THE SHOES

This was the first song I wrote with our harmony vocal style in mind. So in truth, it was the first song written for The Wildhearts. After receiving what was known as a development deal (a record company budget for putting together a band), I spotted CJ. He was a stand-out guitarist in a rather generic-looking band - albeit in an era of

generic-looking bands. CJ and I wasted over a year auditioning tonally-challenged hacks pawning themselves off as singers. We decided that recording demos would reveal their shortcomings – a suggestion from Ric Browde (of Ted Nugent, Joan Jett and Poison fame) who was producing the band at the time.

In the end, accidentally driving a tractor into a swimming pool was about the most eventful thing that happened during those demo sessions. The fucking thing started first time too – after being dragged out some two hours later. But if a new set of auditions were to take place, then a new set of songs should be recorded. I was so fucking sick of the ones we'd been playing. Musically, I was desperate to move on.

After we argued over who would sing lead vocals on the new demo, we reached a compromise: we agreed to sing in harmony, Everly Brothers style. That demo of new songs was snapped up by Ric, who at the time was scouting for US label ATCO. He loved the harmony style of vocals and signed us immediately. It was the last thing we expected, and sometimes I wish we'd waited to find the right vocalist. But perhaps we would have never found him? Even if we had, it's unlikely our career would have lasted over 25 years. But I was dragged into the role of frontman, kicking and screaming. Especially screaming.

I still hate singing to this day. But I'm grateful that I have a career at all. I assume that this odd detour in fortune is down to the fact that I neither act nor sound like a traditional rock singer – for better or for worse. Many would say for worse.

I've been accused of being my own worst enemy more times than I've received pats on the back, yet I'm still here after many have fallen along the way.

Maybe the insults, the doubters and the critical maulings I've received over the years have rewarded me with uncommon survival abilities? Maybe I'm just a lucky fucker? I suspect this will be a subject that we'll over-analyse throughout the course of this book.

'Nothing Ever Changes But The Shoes' was the song where the picture came together for me. It was our musical style officially stamped in quick-hardening cement, giving it an actual tangible shape.

### **CRYING OVER NOTHING**

Before Danny, Stidi or even Bam joined the band, we had Joolz on bass and Pat on drums. Amazingly colourful, engaging characters and a killer rhythm section given simple punk/rock 'n' roll songs to play. But once I made a conscious effort to bring in complex, often experimental musical slabs of riffs and tempo changes, it was obvious to CJ and I that these guys were out of their comfort zone. And not in a constructive way. In fact it was piecing together 'Crying Over Nothing' in rehearsal where it became glaringly apparent that things needed to change. It was also no coincidence that this was the very first song which we jammed with Bam. Just to make sure he had not only power and confidence, but imagination and a memory for parts.

This song made it onto the 'Mondo Akimbo A-Go-Go' EP<sup>1</sup> by sheer virtue that I was desperate to incorporate this heavier style into our sound. It was also fun to play

<sup>1</sup> Merchandise Play: a term for a release longer than the traditional two-song single, but shorter than the typical six-song mini-album.

live; it gave us a break from being glued to the mic stands. Truth is, we rearranged this one so much over time that it doesn't even feel like a complete song as much as a care home for some good riffs. But hey, a good riff is a good riff. Amen to that.

### **LIBERTY CAP**

Once the band started playing live, our notoriety as being fond of drugs quickly grew. This was to be utterly expected and I welcomed the reputation, to be honest. I'd always loved magic mushrooms. When you grow up in an environment with little money and fewer opportunities, the concept of a free natural high that grows in a local field takes on religious levels of importance. I'd been worshipping at the church of psilocybin for over a decade before The Wildhearts even came about.

In fact Danny had recently joined at the point of writing 'Liberty Cap', and part of his initiation ceremony was ingesting hallucinogens – just to make sure he could handle our vices at the time. Bam completed the line-up, recommended by Mark Dearnley, who'd previously worked with Dogs D'Amour and was producing one of our demos. Although I was never a fan of the more blues-based rock 'n' roll of Dogs D'Amour, I thought their drummer was cool as fuck and I had a feeling he could hold his own in a more powerful group. I was right.

When Danny and Bam were fully locked-in, they were a demonic rhythm section. Both played loose yet dense and tight. The brooding tribalism of 'Liberty Cap' showcased the guys perfectly. I was convinced that a potential new audience were just waiting for our off-kilter brand of music. Satisfying myself was enough to begin with. Once I was convinced, we could take this on the road and start creating converts.

By the way, a liberty cap is the magic mushroom with a small nipple on top of the bonnet, commonly found in the UK.

### **SPLATTERMANIA**

At the time of writing 'Splattermania', I was making a few quid on top of unemployment benefit from trading rare, imported video copies of splatter and gore movies from around the world, it's a genre still close to my heart. One day a police raid saw all my tapes and video copying equipment seized in a thoroughly pointless exercise. It was carried out by the police department normally in charge of paedophilia investigations. Video piracy was in its infancy at the time. I urged the police to at least watch some of the films if only to learn the vast difference in levels of criminality. The only criminal element in my collection was the acting.

My charges were merely the ghost of a nonsensical prosecution and outdated law. Throughout the 80s, a ridiculous round-up of movies – comically named the 'Video Nasties' list – were considered a national threat. At a time when Margaret Thatcher was raping northern industry and causing unfathomable financial heartbreak.

During the demolition of a coal mining community – like that of my home town of South Shields – the idea that rubbermonsters filled with red paint could be considered offensive was simply another example of a gullible nation being distracted from the real criminal activities in operation at the time. So I refused to capitulate. If you

couldn't rent these movies from the video stores, then I'd make them available by other means. Plus there were also some pretty amazing movies on the list. *Soldier Blue*, for example. It was a western based on a massacre of Cheyenne Indians. When the censored cuts were removed, the atrocities carried out by the American soldiers made the massacre look more like a fair fight. Fucking pointless and also historically damaging. I pleaded with the police to watch this movie but I received short shrift. In fact I was warned to shut up and play nice or risk going to jail.

So with the band finally getting somewhere, doing the right thing meant sticking to the recording schedules and not entering into my new career with jail time and a criminal record. 'Splattermania' was written as much about the heavy-handed treatment I received as it was my love for Grand Guignol.

At the time, a video was proposed to be directed by *Hellraiser* effects guru Bob Keen and set to feature Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing, Vincent Price and John Carradine, (classic horror legends then all still alive) was proposed. It was even hinted that the video could be shown as a support feature - effectively touring theatres with the next *Hellraiser* movie. But our record label decided this idea wasn't worth the budget. Sadly, shortly after the decision to nix the video, Vincent Price, Peter Cushing and John Carradine would all pass on (sadly, we lost Christopher Lee at the time of working on this book). We'd missed our chance. This would become a common occurrence. Termination of the video idea created the embryonic stage of my continually souring relationship with East/West Records.

### **WEEKEND (5 Long Days)**

Written with our soon-to-be trademark vocal style in mind, 'Weekend' was a song designed to be a live favourite. The problem was that it always sounded flat and uninspired to me when played live. I had no idea why. It sometimes happens. Some songs just fly when played live onstage, others flap wildly but never truly take off anywhere. More proof that music is far more mysterious than a bunch of notes played by a bunch of guys.

It was also our first spontaneous crowd reaction song when we first played it in Japan. The entire audience suddenly started singing the middle section back to us, resulting in both equal levels of embarrassment and confusion from the band. We'd soon warm to the concept of audience participation, but at first I can't say that it sat well with our anti-arena rock principles.

I liked the sentiment of the song and was quite happy with the verse melody. In comparison, the chorus never enjoyed the grandiose authority of, say, Phil Spector producing the Ramones. Because of that - for me anyway - it failed to capture any essence of the working class being released from their chains of labour come Friday night - the theme I was hoping for. Amazingly - and entirely out of character - we recorded the song again, about six years later, with similarly disappointing results.

### **SOMETHING WEIRD (Going On In My Head)**

A song written to get an imaginary audience bouncing. It suffered from over expectation and naïveté mistakes that I guess you have to make in order to learn from them. For the first two EPs I'd been trying to find my vocal style. Hoping for





a cross between Robin Zander and Jake Burns (whilst shoehorning in some Kurt Cobain), I'd often end up sounding like a wounded sea cow honking out for help. Mercifully, I was able to bark out melodies strong enough – or at least with which to buy time to develop my own vocal sound.

The reception of our first EP met with dishwater-dull reviews so the label decided to have both EPs combined and mixed for a mini-album. This would be done by Terry Date in Seattle. Grunge was still de rigueur at the time and Terry was the guru behind Soundgarden. So I agreed to the decision, cashed in my first publishing cheque and Danny and I flew over to see what all the fuss was about. There really was very little fuss at all. Grunge was dying quicker than the UK papers could write about it and a familiar chasm was starting to form in the music industry. I'd seen this before (in the early 80s) and I imagined that the obvious next step would be punk-based. I also saw that this is exactly where our band could fit in – nice and early – with this new movement. But East/West Records had a wildly differing opinion. This – for me – is the precise point where our potential was squandered and our greatest chance fully wasted.

It was in Seattle that I took my first smoke of crack. The hit seemed like pure love. In my tireless search for the perfect high, I couldn't figure out how I'd avoided this feeling until now. Neither could I figure out how the slimy drug dealer loading the pipe had such a drop-dead stunner as a girlfriend. I'd never met a crack whore before. Obviously crack stories don't come with happy endings, but for now, the honeymoon period was in full bloom.

Taking my brand new buzz for a midnight walk around the streets of Seattle, I was accosted in an alley by an armed assailant demanding my wallet. I don't know how or why I fronted the guy out, but I remember yelling, "You'd better shoot me with that thing or I'll stick it up your arse!" To this day, I still have no idea why the guy ran away. Perhaps my accent added an edge? Perhaps he just didn't want to do jail time for someone who seemingly wanted to be shot? Still, it features in my top ten near death experiences.

'Something Weird' reminds me of that amazing trip: travelling from Seattle to Mexico with some new friends we met at a Napalm Death gig. We forced the plane to land at LAX due to our excessive onboard behaviour. Yet our new friends possessed enough charm to talk our way into a free hotel for the night. As we sipped margaritas on the hotel balcony overlooking LAX, we collectively watched a UFO sail into our line of view, abruptly stop, alter its position, and shoot up into the night sky.

On the same trip we pretended we were Bon Jovi so that an entire bar in La Cruz would buy us free drinks all night to have photographs taken with us. The song even reminds me of having sex with a stranger on the beach in Mexico; only stopping because a dozen stray dogs came by and started shagging next to us. I was completely unaware that sex in a public place in Mexico comes with an instant jail sentence. I recall having to find my way back to our apartment in the dark, without so much as an address, just a vague recollection of what our street looked like.

It was the same trip when I woke up naked (after accompanying two cute travellers home one evening) with only my shoes remaining. Like Bruce Banner, I had to steal trousers and a shirt from a clothes line.

Tales of innocence meeting danger and simply walking away with a good story. These were great times, no doubt about it.

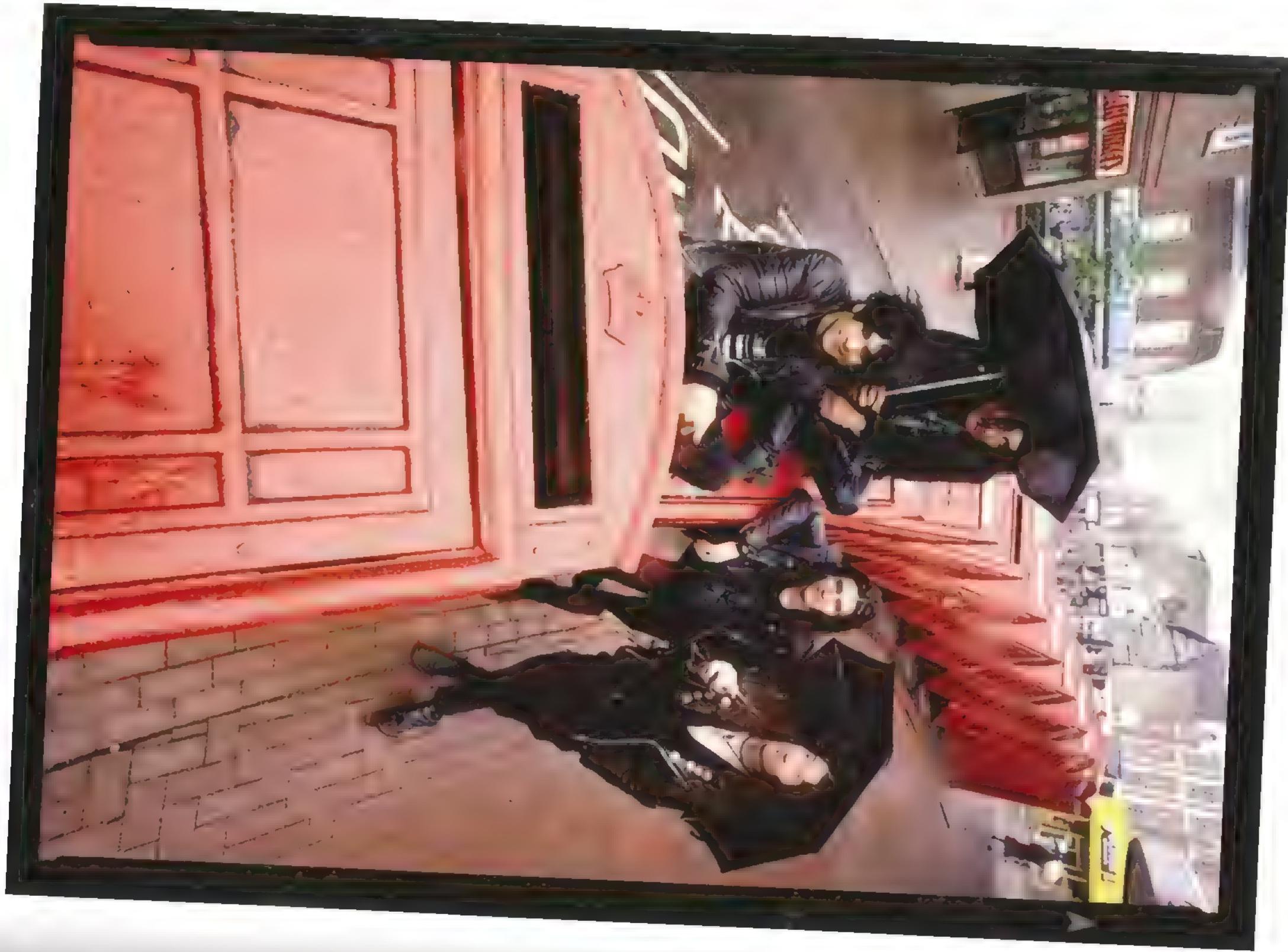
### DREAMING IN A

In the late 80s - some time before publishing cheques enabled us to book flights on a whim - I was still trying to figure out how to stay high on a budget. Selling acid made a lot of sense. Especially considering we used to take so much of it. We wouldn't even consider going to a club or a gig without being catatonic on LSD. Nailing that first euphoric rush to the perfect song or situation was an artform in which we truly excelled. I loved the stuff. Everything we did in those early days was in a lysergically-induced state of super consciousness. LSD was the poor man's rich pickings. 'Dreaming In A'<sup>2</sup> was written whilst tripping, the pure view from within an LSD storm. I remember having the song completed in about 10 minutes and playing it for the rest of the night.

This was also a time when lavish record label parties still existed. We'd get hammered on free booze and fill our coat linings with buffet food. Even the catering girls knew our faces by then and they'd box up food for us take home. That was unless I was being hoisted out - semi-conscious and unable to walk. Journalists would know if the party was worth attending if I was being carried out as they arrived.

I was broke, living in a squat and up for any free fun. There was plenty around. It was a fun time where you had to develop the art of hustling. Although I used to take way more acid than I actually sold, it paid me with a good song and great memories. We were still having fun with drugs back then. It actually felt like a gang at this point. This was before the first album would make more opportunities available to us. I was the perennially skint musician - bumming around for a high and a drink. While the opportunities that glowed the brightest weren't always the ones most advisable to take, I took them all anyway. What did I have to lose? It could have all been over any day. None of us planned for this to last, let alone for over 20 years!

<sup>2</sup> The 'A' in the title is also in reference to the guitar chord that the song is based around.







Where I regain  
success, make my  
first ever album,  
hire our original  
drummer again,  
fire him again,  
find the perfect  
drummer, fall in love  
with Mick Ronson  
and out of love with  
our record company.



## TV TAN

We recorded two EPs with Bam – he had the best swing of any drummer I'd heard. But it was obvious he wouldn't enjoy playing Gatling gun-style snare fills and the countless tempo changes required for our new Helmet/Metallica style riffs to thrive. And 'Earth vs' was full of them. So we decided to get Stidi back in the band. He'd been there at the very beginning but had quickly grown tired of living the hand-to-mouth London hustle. He'd returned to the relative comfort and familiarity of the north east.

Stidi's audition for returning was to meet us at Wessex studios to record a demo of 'TV Tan'. I knew his style and I was confident he'd pick it up straight away. But he played so well we didn't contemplate auditioning another candidate. We even used that demo performance on the actual album. Truth is, the rest of the album was also recorded as demos. The sound contained so much raw spirit that it was ideal for the urgency of a debut. The demos were recorded on well-worn tape (or 'gash' tape, as it was known) by probably hundreds of other bands before us. That was our official first release. Perhaps the worn-out, almost transparent tape added to the raw quality of the finished album? Who knows? It was an insane idea but it worked.

'TV Tan' was a basic description of my very standard rock 'n' roll life at the time – stoned, drunk and speeding – perched in front of a TV set with a guitar on my lap. In fact I hardly knew anyone who didn't lead an almost identical existence. The video for 'TV Tan', – which attempted to depict that lifestyle – was a far more thrilling story. I've always been keen on checking out up-and-coming artistic talent in local schools and colleges and give them an opportunity. Some of these gifted kids would end up finding work way beneath their talents. Some would find no work at all. So I wanted to allow them a chance to shine – at least once. I was certain I'd find what I needed already struggling to burst through the outer shell of negligence that was the apathetic education system of the time.

This was my experience, anyway – as an autodidact from a broken home with no financial standing. I often wondered how much skill was squandered away in favour of factory work. I wanted to explore deeper.

So I walked into the London Royal College of Art and offered up a chance for their top three artists to get involved in a proper 'pop' video. They went for it. It's an approach I've employed ever since. Just ask people for things. They often say yes. The video cost a few hundred quid and was shown umpteen times on TV. Two of the artists even went on to be famous designers whose work would show up regularly on MTV – which I'd regard with almost parental pride.

Success then for the video. And proof positive – for me at least – that I was never meant to front a band; never has a frontman looked more awkward in a promo video. "Dance around more," they'd say. "Make more exaggerated facial gestures," they'd say. All I could think was, "Shit, I have to do this for a living? We're all in big trouble..."

## GREETINGS FROM SHITSVILLE

I was greatly influenced by Frank Zappa and Steve Albini – both of whom swore they'd never write love ballads. While writing 'Earth vs' I adopted this ideology with my standard obsessive zeal: I avoided anything approaching schmaltz. Something in which – as a 70s child – I'd been over-educated. Every song would represent something autobiographical. Relationships, alcohol, cultural references – even the cockroaches infesting the flat in which I was living. Anything but love.

I named my flat 'Shitsville' – a grubby old Victorian townhouse just off Swiss Cottage. It had a crumbling front wall that would casually drop brick and mortar onto the cars parked in front. I loved it. This was before I learned to drive and owned a car so I didn't care. In fact I found car bonnets crumpled like tin foil by boulders of brickwork fucking hilarious.

I found most things hilarious at the time – usually as a result of the amphetamine-induced mania and attendant insomnia. It got so bad that once the police kicked down my front door after a one-man domestic freak-out in my flat. Something I'd enjoy on a regular basis. It usually involved things being smashed or thrown through windows. Sometimes even open windows. This particular incident saw an airborne vacuum cleaner reach terminal velocity after leaving my 7th floor apartment. Thinking I'd thrown myself rather than an upright Hoover out of the window, one of the sight-impaired pensioners living below reported a suicide to the police.

Two weeks it took to replace that heavyweight fucking door. Even that was funny. What wasn't quite so funny was the fact that the heating was set to tropical even in summer. It was a fucking sweatbox. The heat, coupled with the building slowly disintegrating, resulted in a post-apocalyptic cockroach infestation. I'd fight them with anything to hand, but they were speedy little fuckers and I eventually accepted defeat. So instead I wrote a song about them.

I wrote most of 'Earth vs The Wildhearts' (and some of 'PHUQ') in this same place and state of mind: sleep-deprived and high as a fucking kite. It was the first time I'd lived on my own and this was a great first gaff. Plenty of women, tons of mayhem and a crash course in creativity. I wrote every day and most of the ideas were keepers. The week after I vacated the premises, the front of the building collapsed entirely causing untold damage below – thankfully mostly to cars (why do I still find that so funny?). The Shitsville building – already clinging on for dear life with a scaffolding life support – finally gave up and died. I felt I'd had taken the best it had to offer and I'm thankful to this day for its part in my story.

Somewhat confusingly, 'Welcome To Shitsville', to use its working title, was originally written about a fellow called Pete Winkelman (ex-managing director of Bronze Records) who acted as band scapegoat when our record label wouldn't answer the phone. I was never quite sure of his role in our organisation, but I was very fond of Pete. I was delighted when he went on to make his name as chairman of Wimbledon FC after moving them to Milton Keynes and renaming them MK Dons. His tenacious and fearless spirit motivated me more than any living person – and still does.

When I was asked if there were any musical guests I wanted to appear on the album I could only think of three choices:

- 1) Anyone from Cardiacs.
- 2) Mick Ronson.
- 3) The girl with the husky voice who sang a sanitary towel advert that I loved. Who turned out to be Stevie Lange.

I was delighted that all three requests were met. In fact, 'Earth Vs' was the last album released to feature Mick Ronson before his untimely death. While he was still working on his own solo album right up until he passing, I'm honoured that this would have been the last time Mick heard himself perform on record.

#### **MY BABY IS A HEADFUCK**

During this period of hedonism, a cool bunch of friends grew around us. Mostly made up of bikers, punks, football hooligans and very cool girls. Some made it through alive while others sadly didn't. 'My Baby Is A Headfuck' was dedicated to the same girl as the song 'Nita Nitro' on 'PHUQ'. Moody, slightly intimidating, red dreadlocked hair, tattoos: we were practically identical. In fact we were so similar that neither of us was going to make the first move. So we never did. Still, her overbearing fuck-you attitude was an obvious reaction to the same chronic shyness that I grew up with as a kid. On a subliminal level we must have recognised this in each other. And although things never progressed beyond intrigue, I was crazy about her and I was convinced that our union was inevitable. Sadly, it never was.

After residence in the Shitsville tenement was terminated, I went through a lengthy period of couch-surfing around friends' houses. This song came to me one drunken night at my good mate Ray Zell's place. I didn't really have a "Baby" at the time, so I wrote it about the girl I wanted more than anyone. Eventually Ray and I would share numerous flats together wherein I'd pen albums worth of tunes - from the likes of 'In Lilly's Garden' to 'Sky Babies'. But 'My Baby Is A Headfuck' was the first I wrote during this rich period of excessive abandon. In fact I don't think we were sober in the three years that Ray and I lived together.

The end section of this song was thrown together when I found out that Mick Ronson was on board. Originally tipped as producer, but losing the gig due to ill health, I swear that this song wouldn't have appeared on the album had Mick not agreed to play. Even after losing the job as producer, Mick was still gracious enough to come to the studio and show CJ and I just how much work we needed to put in as guitarists. I've never heard anyone make a guitar sing the way that he did. It was all we could do to summon up the balls to dare play alongside him.

#### **SUCKERPUNCH**

Our label East/West - who took over after ATCO was dismantled - was adamant that we needed more fast songs. Being predominantly a writer and fan of melody, I've never taken much notice of the tempo of a song. My only concern was that the tempo fitted the track itself. Writing something a specific speed was something of which I had no experience. In fact tempo has always been something of a mystery to me and something that I'd usually get wrong. I used to assume that since a song is

always played faster when played live, it would make sense to record them slightly faster than intended. A ridiculous idea that occasionally worked. But more often than not, it would just spoil the song.

To tell me to sit down and write a fast song was like saying, ‘write something that everyone will like’. But I accepted the challenge and wrote to order – for the first time in my life. Actually that’s not entirely true: I took a ton of speed and ripped off Motörhead. Many people have accused ‘Suckerpunch’ of being an ‘Ace Of Spades’ rip-off, which is grossly unfair and untrue. It was an ‘Overkill’ rip-off.

Oddly enough I’ve since become friends with Lemmy and been in the fortunate position to apologise in person. I’ve also been extremely privileged to be invited to play ‘Overkill’ with Motörhead at Hammersmith Odeon. Although I will confess that I was initially asked to play it in Sheffield. I figured what the hell, I’d push my luck and ask to play with them at the legendary Hammersmith. Simply because I knew that most of my friends would be there – and a few of my enemies. Lemmy initially said nothing in reply to this request, he merely gave me a look that said, ‘you cheeky cunt’ and walked off. But at the soundcheck in London, Lemmy walked up to me and said, “Well, are you playing this fucking song tonight or not?” One of the proudest moments of my life and I will love him forever for it.

In fact Lemmy almost played ‘Suckerpunch’ with us when we supported The Darkness in LA in 2004. Until Justin Hawkins had him barred from the building because of something Lemmy had said in an interview about calling The Darkness a novelty band. Dave Grohl was at the show that night. I told him what had gone down between Justin and Lemmy. With his assistance we were able to unite the bickering frontmen over drinks at Lemmy’s regular haunt, the Rainbow Bar & Grill on Sunset Boulevard. As we watched these two very intelligent men make peace with each other, Dave Grohl and I smiled broadly at each other as if to say, “and that is the power of rock ‘n’ roll”.

Dave Grohl tells the same story in the 2010 Lemmy documentary movie – but he eliminates me from it.

## NEWS OF THE WORLD

'News Of The World' was another of my attempts to write a Stiff Little Fingers song (Just as with 'Nothing Ever Changes But The Shoes' or 'The Revolution Will Be Televised'). I guess every songwriter has regular tricks and habits. When I have an SLF-style verse, I know I'm on to a winner right off the blocks. It was also one of the first times I copied from one of my own songs. Which I think is professionally described as 'developing a style'. Taking a tip from the longer songs on 'Mondo Akimbo A-Go-Go', I ran with the instrumental mid-section theme - originally designed purely to get us off the microphones when playing live. It's a style that has set me up nicely for many years now: a chance to have a wander around the stage. It's also encouraged by being a reluctant singer/frontman.

During this prolifically fertile period of writing, I had so many riffs pouring from me that I'd be constantly advised to "keep them for later" or reliably told "you'll probably run out." Not being someone who particularly valued the advice of others, I was never tempted to listen. Now, after a successful 20th anniversary tour of "Earth vs The Wildhearts", I'm thankful for my stubborn streak. I did, however, listen to some advice given to me by a great producer who worked with us in the early days, Mark Dearnley (previously mentioned as the fellow instrumental in Barn joining the band). His advice was to, "take every single idea I have and put them all on the album I'm currently making". I hear his voice every time I attempt one of my seven-minute-plus songs. And I've yet to run out of fresh ideas.

Ignoring advice is sometimes very important. No-one's an expert on what's coming next, right? So why hang on to anything? I'm a strong believer that instinct is the key to longevity. Which effectively translates as, 'only listen to advice that you already agree with'. Although I don't presume this suggestion will work for everyone, it certainly hasn't let me down. I like to finish an album and leave the studio a spent husk of a man - with a head full of clear air and tumbleweed. Who knows - it might be the last recording I ever make. I guess that answers why I write songs with so many parts.

## SHAME ON ME

This one had been lying around since Pat and Joolz were the band's rhythm section. In fact I clearly remember that line-up trying to wrap their heads around one of the irritating middle riffs, with hilariously angry results. Few things give me a greater feeling of satisfaction than writing a riff I can't even play myself yet.

Back in our very early days, we used to have a one-handed guitar tech, with whom I used to hang out and take heroin. One handed people tend not to make good guitar techs and he was no exception. But he had great drug contacts. Heroin makes some people vomit and I was a puker. I liked it, but I knew it wasn't really the drug for me. But these were experimental times and I was a very keen dabbler. After an all-night session around '88, I was walking home in the rain, largely oblivious to anything (including the rain) when this 'Last Train To Clarksville'-esque melody joined me on my journey and kept me company. I loved it, and sang it all the way home.

It seemed to tie up a lot of loose threads; walking home to save money, for one. But it touched on rumour-mongering too - a common language of the London rock

'n' roll scene at the time that I always found infuriatingly boring. Didn't anyone have anything to talk about that they themselves were actually doing? Something inspiring? The truth was that no one was active in doing anything and I wanted to break out of this stagnant scene as quickly as I could. So in one stream of heroin-fuelled, rain-saturated consciousness, by the time I reached my flat the song was completely written.

I can honestly say I've written no more than three songs in my life under the influence of heroin. I find it a shit drug for creating anything other than a good nap. But I've always liked this song, it's fun to play live and it demands some above-average guitar skills. Or showboating as some would quite rightly call it. The riffs are massively influenced by Anthrax's 'Spreading The Disease' album. I consider Scott Ian to be as much of a skilled rhythm guitarist as James Hetfield or Malcolm Young.

'Shame On Me' is the oldest song on 'Earth vs' but only because our version of 'Church Of The Broken Hearted' (written around 1986) was embarrassingly earnest and never made the cut. It would resurface some seven years later for the Silver Ginger 5 album – once I was able to sing and play it properly.

### **EVERLONE**

'Everlone' was written as a celebration of loneliness and alienation, subjects traditionally approached in whiney voices to morose musical backing. I wanted a Cardiacs-sized chorus to make the subject matter purely paradoxical. I wanted to take the piss. I wanted an arena-sized refrain. A bold move, at the time, for someone who had no aspirations to play larger shows than The Damned or Ramones.

Around this time, unrest between our label and myself escalated in frequency, often turning into defiant spats. Nothing too dramatic back then, just enough for me to realise that landing a record contract wasn't the golden goose I'd coveted since being a kid. But having no idea what lay within the pages of a contract, I had no idea how much I was willingly giving away. For example, I had no idea that I'd instantly lose the rights to my own songs once they were recorded.

Squabbles and disagreements would flare up. In hindsight, they always seemed to be based around the label wanting us to be a bigger band than I had any ambition of becoming. Or at least a different band than I wanted us to be. I wasn't a fan of singles bands and had no idea how to go about being one.

But life inside the band was fine. We had pocket money which meant we could lick our wounds with drugs and alcohol, which were always in healthy supply. Even when we ran out of pocket money. An effective and traditional corporate method of keeping troublesome bands at bay, I'd imagine.

I'm very fond of 'Everlone' and it's still great fun to play onstage after more than 20 years. It wasn't until years after recording that I realised how similar the opening verse riff was to 'Move On' from Paul Stanley's first solo album. Being a huge Kiss fan as a kid, I'd be an idiot to deny the influence. But I will say that I do put myself through obsessive levels of scrutiny before allowing anything I write to be released. It is inevitable that slivers of a writer's record collection will slip through the net.

and this is a case in point.

There's also a chord shape I use in this song that Richie Ranno used a lot with Starz - another big influence on my writing. I still don't know the name of this chord (being self-taught, I don't know the name of most of the fancy chords I use) but it's all over the dreamy instrumental part of this song. It's also all over 'Everlong', by the Foo Fighters, released three years later. I very much doubt that Dave Grohl consciously ripped me off (as flattering as that would undoubtedly be), but it is likely he'd heard 'Everlong' as we once shared the same UK press officer. I've heard a few bands write stuff that sounds a little similar to something I've written. Arrogantly I take it as a compliment, whether the similarity is intentional or not. They might even hate the original - I know that has happened to me in the past. Writers will often let a distant memory infect a fresh idea without even knowing it.

#### **DRINKING ABOUT LIFE**

Imagine a time when people would go to each other's houses to listen to their vinyl record collections. Yes that actually used to happen, kids! CJ and I were hugely into bands like Bad Brains and Fishbone. He also used to educate me on a lot of stuff like Big Drill Car and The Descendents. They had these great, really short bursts of punk fury that would detonate, charge around the room for a minute then leave it a shattered mess as the next song ignited. I've always loved short, sharp hardcore punk, so I wanted to take this approach but tie it to a Bad Brains/Anthrax riff.

Like I've said, I love writing riffs that I can't really play. It challenges you and keeps the sport fresh. 'Drinking About Life' is such a riff. In fact this was our first "check us out" moment. I wrote it because I wanted to show that just because we hated big showy guitar solos, that didn't mean we were slouches on the guitar. I guess we could have both been great lead guitarists if we actually liked lead guitarists. In fact I can count how many lead guitar players I like on one hand... and still have enough fingers left to play this song. Or at least as well as I could play it back then.

#### **THE MILES AWAY GIRL**

We'd been gifted a few great support tours by this point as a band. Amazing incidents and memories filled each trek but the LA-based Love/Hate tour would be the one that introduced me to the second love of my life (the first one being crack cocaine). She was a Welsh nurse who became my girlfriend for a number of years. Initially I'd walked past her after a Love/Hate show in Cardiff and spent the rest of the night desperately tracking her down. Once I found her, I set about persuading her that I was her new fella. It worked. We were inseparable for years until an unhealthy mixture of youth, irresponsibility and lifestyle got in the way and we broke up.

I still think about her a lot and wonder if we'll get to swap stories someday, although I suspect this will never happen. It's one of those things you look forward to while accepting the unlikely nature of this particular wish. She had a unique and often alien take on the world around her. This is my tribute to her, the closest thing to a love ballad on the album.

I remember wanting 'The Miles Away Girl' to sound like Jason & The Scorchers

in the verse and Stiff Little Fingers in the chorus. Luckily, I've since been able to confess my theft to both of those bands and they were more than gracious in their acceptance of my pilfering. It's a great feeling when people accept the stealing of their styles as a compliment. I fail to see how anyone in their right mind doesn't see it the same way.

I'm still very fond of this song and enjoy playing it live. I guess the closeness of the subject matter – at least during the time – still carries enough weight to lend the song gravitas when singing it some 20 odd years later. Ironic as it was so close to a love song that I'd originally intended to leave it off the album.

This song has since pulled one particular fan out of a coma. Because of this example, I refuse to be a critic of any songs I write. If a song wants to be born, I'll happily give birth to it. Regardless of my personal opinion of a new composition, I would never assume how important it might be to someone else.

#### **LOVESHIT**

In the early 90s there was an advert on the television for Bodyform and the voice in the ad was pure male hormone catnip. The voice, as it turned out, was Stevie Lange, ex-wife of top producer Mutt Lange. Infinitely more crucial, I might add, was that she was also the voice for my favourite TV advert as a kid: the animated commercial for Limara bodyspray. Anyone remember that? The girl washing in the lake? Have a look on YouTube. Holy crap, that thing dragged my barely pubescent system dancing through the brambles with every screening. Nothing short of sonic pornography. I was, therefore, delighted when East/West told me they could get her to appear on the album. At which point I quickly wrote 'Loveshit' for the occasion.

Stevie met Mick Ronson for the first time at this session and instantly loved him – as did everyone who met him. Just hanging out with these two staples of my youth was more payment for making music than I'd ever need or deserve. I've always regarded working with influential people as the kind of cheque that out-values money by an unchartable margin. That particular day at the studio – recording and sharing stories – certainly fed back some positive rock 'n' roll energy into the hallowed brickwork of Wessex studios – home of too many amazing albums to list here.

'Loveshit' was based around the musical stylings of Starz – an ill-fated US rock band whose singer, Michael Lee Smith, influenced my lyrical style. Possibly the most under-rated US rock vocalist of all time, it was with great honour that some 15-odd years later, Michael Lee Smith would sing this song onstage with me at an LA Viper Room gig. Word-for-word and without the aid of a lyric sheet. This huge influence of mine had taken time to learn every single word by heart. In fact, I played bass for Starz on their UK debut show in London. They ran through an impromptu version of this song during the show, taking me completely by surprise, especially as I'd never played bass to this song before. The shape that events took was so unlikely. From recording this simple little song – not knowing if anyone would ever even hear it – to the present day; playing it at the UK debut of the very band that inspired it. Dreams can and do come true. I say that with absolute conviction. Inevitably The Wildhearts story would get much darker but boy, did it start out well.

## LOVE YOU 'TIL I DON'T

Although the rest of the band had already recorded albums, 'Earth Vs The Wildhearts' was my first. I was the only album virgin in the band and I wanted a big outro for my debut. Who knew - it may well have been the last album I'd have ever made.

My favourite trick was the false ending - as typified by the Starz track 'Boys In Action'. So I crammed in a deliberately misleading riff, then a guitar assault-course that ran through 'Love Gun'-style scattershot blasts, four-on-the-floor Anthrax stumps, crunching flat-palm Hetfield strumming and AC/DC ramalama. Simply put, it was a who's who of the heavier guitar music that had shaped me as a player. As a guitarist, it's still a delight to play to this very day.

The song began with a chorus that I'm still convinced I'd heard somewhere before (and am still waiting for the charges to be issued). I simply built the song from there. In fact, I think I stole the title too. I've never been one to claim invention of the wheel over admission of being a total fanboy. If I like a piece of music, I'll steal it.

You won't always know it when you finally hear it, but a lot of my songs were directly inspired from hearing something on the radio and chipping to the guitar before the memory evaporates. I still do it to this day. A chorus is often the first component to a brand new song. But it could also be inspired by a subject matter, a theme, or simply turn of phrase. However, they are all directly inspired by something. I hope this doesn't burst too many bubbles out there. Sometimes I'll have bits and pieces that didn't get invited to the party, but they never truly get left out. As such, with songs like 'Love You 'Til I Don't', I take those leftover ideas and I shoehorn them into another song - especially one that's barely a chorus. With that confession on the table, I hope you consider that I'm no smarter as a songwriter than a bird building a nest out of available materials...

## CAMPING HOME

Once the label decided that this grubby little collection of songs (originally recorded as demos) would be the actual album, they halted the release until we could prepare a single - complete with B-sides. They would then hold back the second pressing of the album to include one of these B-sides as an album track, then eventually a single in its own right. Oh it sure starts getting confusing from here on in...

Being an intractable bastard in all things creative, I insisted on three new songs per single. The logic of which was that if we were to be a singles band, then it meant I'd get to record more songs - which was just fine by me. I loved recording studios back then. Huge residential places with house cooks who prepared three dinner breaks a day. Control rooms seemingly designed for all-night parties. Plus I didn't know how many singles I would get to release, so I was damned if I was going to miss a chance to make new music and party. Like I said, no one knew when this bus was about to stop and order everyone off.

It was also fairly obvious that we needed a new drummer. Someone with the power of Cozy Powell but the flair of Tommy Lee. We were heavy and we wanted to get heavier. As was now customary, auditions for new drummers would be assessed in a recording studio and appear on album. Although unbeknown to them at the

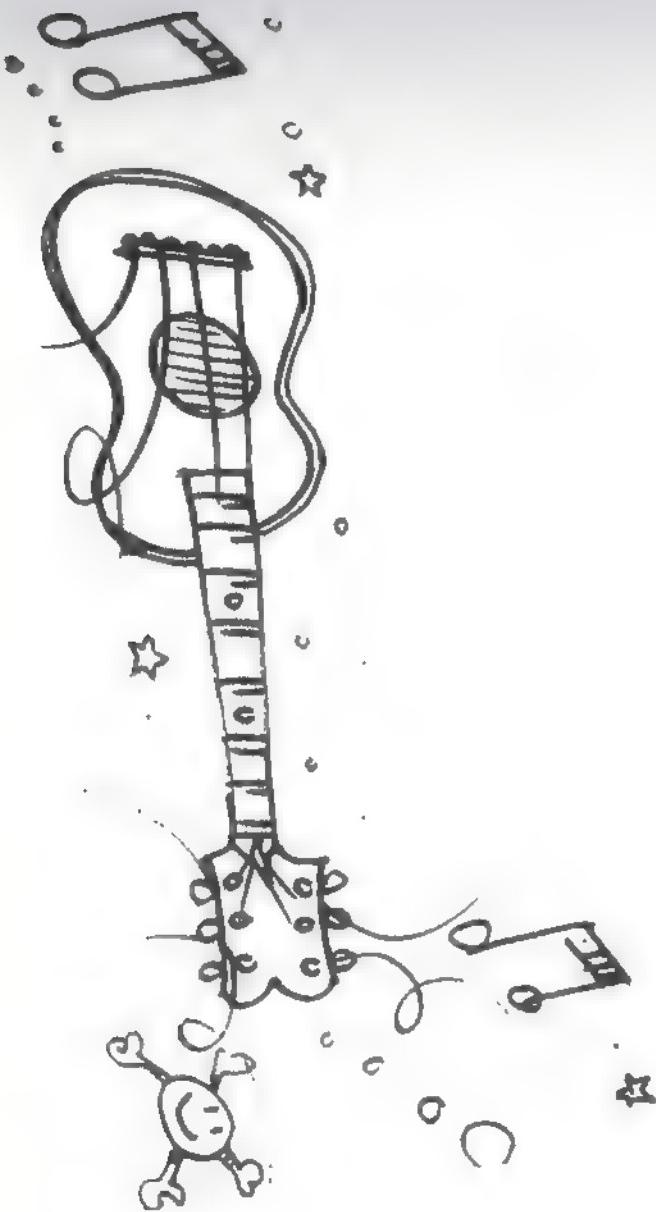
time. So no pressure there. This time it was the turn of a man who would, to this day, become my favourite drummer to play with: Ritch Battersby. So what better way to test the mettle of the poor young chump than with something even faster than 'Suckerpunch'? Enter 'Caffeine Bomb'.

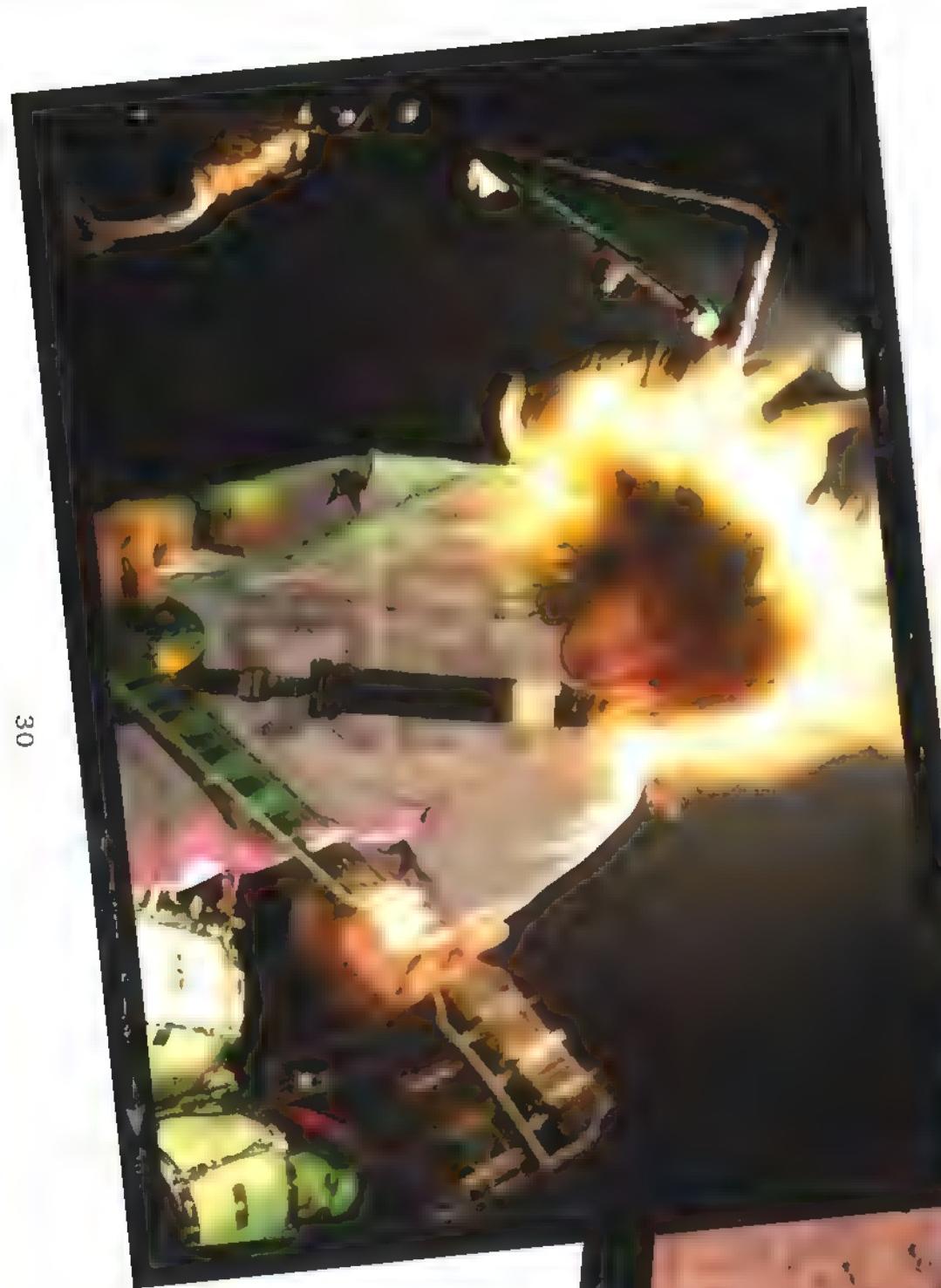
Trivia fans may care that the term 'Caffeine Bomb' came from writer/TV host Krusher Joule, who coined the phrase after I poured a very large Jack Daniel's into a black coffee, then topped it with half a dozen sugars. It was a desperate bid to kill a sledgehammer hangover and add a spring to my step.

Based around the 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' vocals - albeit played by the Damned, 'Caffeine Bomb' was an instant hit with A&R guru Dante Bonutto. He rallied for its inclusion on the second run of our debut album - the first pressing of which was already selling out quickly. With the first batch of copies flying out of the shops because of constant touring - to the utter amazement of East/West - the simple task of re-stocking record shops would prove to be a typically muddled affair, revealing an absence of anything remotely resembling a long-term plan.

The addition of another song to the album put re-ordering so far back that the picture on the reverse of the sleeve - the band stood around a huge '93 - was abandoned. Instead, something more fitting was slapped in its place. I still couldn't tell you what's on the back of the re-issue. I prefer to imagine it's still the '93 picture, but since the album didn't resurface until 1994, I assume this isn't the case.

However, it's safe to say that the band's momentum had been smacked heavily on the head with a mallet. And while an up-all-night, booze loving party band can take a portion of the blame, we can't accept all of it. The lion's share belongs to a record company comatose to our potential, except for undirected outbursts of activity when unexpected bursts of success slapped them awake. They worked on a logic lost on me and one which defied the laws of success. Unless, of course, the East/West long-term plan was to focus on snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. In which case they should have been awarded the golden turd at the bad-business awards, or something. All in all, it was a bad start.









CHAPTER ONE B:  
EARTH VS THE WILDHEARTS  
THE B-SIDES

## SHOW A LIL' EMOTION

This was originally recorded as part of the 'Earth Vs' sessions but kept off the album for stylistic reasons. It appealed to my pop/rock sensibilities and expressed a style to which I often find myself returning. It's easy to tap into but never feels cheap. Fuck it, I like pop/rock. Whilst writing it requires little more than a chorus and a keen ear for melody, arrangement skills mark the real difference between generic and catchy. Hey, it isn't easy being cheesy.

There are 'Earth Vs' demo tapes floating around where this song is listed as 'Showali Love'. I almost prefer that as a title, despite not being exactly sure what a "Showali" is – but liking it nonetheless. Cut from the same cloth as 'Just In Lust', 'Show A Lil' Emotion' reminded me that when I was a kid, most hard rock bands had at least one token pop/rock song per album. Usually nestled amongst the middle of side two, they were generally my favourite on any albums. I blame them.

## DANGERLUST

Only the second super-extended song that I ever wrote (the first being 'Deep In The Arms Of Morpheus' which eventually featured on '555%' in 2012). 'Dangerlust' was conceived as a live work-out that collected a few odds 'n' sods I had lying around and combined them with some new riff ideas.

Going through a huge Beatles obsession at the time, I wanted to lift the middle of 'A Day In The Life', when George Martin instructed the orchestra to go from a root note to the octave of that note – without paying attention to anyone else. I wanted to play on that idea on electric guitars, imagining it would be about 10 times more violent. I was right, it sounded incredible.

We used to perform it back when Joolz and Pat were in the band. We briefly played with a singer named Snake (prior to begrudgingly accepting the role myself). The audience reaction was always mixed. Or, more accurately, confused. That was until the 'George Martin' section kicked in, at which point, patrons would suddenly pay attention. Then, when the 'dayglo buffalo' section of the lyrics took over, the spell would be broken and the audience were free to ignore us again.

The term 'dayglo buffalo' was in reference to a girl we knew who would provide sexual relief and free alcohol in the very early days. She was a buxom lady with a pretty face and lots of money, who wore bright spandex.

I was also heavily into Thai sticks – also referenced in the lyrics – which was Thai grass wrapped on the stem of the plant with hemp rope. Utterly irrelevant I know, but someone might care.

I think the reason I still like this song is because I'm not entirely sure what it's about.

## DOWN ON LONDON

The period between ejection from Quireboys and formation of The Wildhearts was an

interesting one. Rejects of the 80s rock 'n' roll era still loitered like discarded Asda carrier bags littering the west end while a more grass-roots rock scene was struggling to gain traction. A general air of uncertainty permeated London's music scene.

If deficient in personal style with little to latch onto, it was a tough time for poseurs and a third sub-species developed as a result. Plaid shirts worn with cowboy boots, headscarves and Jack Daniel's t-shirts. Cartoon rock 'n' roll with no natural swagger but still a desperate need to be noticed - even if it meant trying to drink like Slash or fight like Motley Crue. The end of every evening would see piles of slightly overweight, cowboy-booted drunks comically slumped in doorways of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street, either covered in puke or blood, or both.

It was a sad time and I couldn't wait for it to be over. In fact I hope I helped kill it in some way - even though I loved a lot of the music being played. Hence this song's attempt at a Mott The Hoople-style swing - albeit played by Roy Wood.

### **SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTH AND USE YOUR FUCKING BRAIN**

With 'Caffeine Bomb' hastily added to 'Earth Vs' and then rush-released as a single, this meant more B-sides. That meant more wasting time and more partying, which was fine by us.

I had no idea how much of our motivation was being flushed down the shitter. All I knew was that I'd become a songwriting animal and lived for the challenge of recording new tunes - especially after the creative rush of recording a full album. Hindsight is a cruel teacher.

I was grabbing influence from everything happening around me, often from a reporter's point of view, but sometimes more personal. This song was written in a taxi to the studio. I was intending to record a different song entirely after an argument with my flatmate, Ray. We'd just got a place together where we were still pissing out our territories. The argument was forgotten by the time I pulled up at the studio. To my knowledge, we never argued again.

In the tradition of those short, fast punk tunes mentioned earlier but with a down-chug James Hetfield/Scott Ian riff powering it along. The lyrics formed an attack at the kind of guys being in whose company I hated. Chancers who would spend the evening talking to you but surveying the room over your shoulder, scoping the room for females. It was never a shock to me that these predatory creeps seldom struck lucky. Nor was it a surprise that they made me look less of a sexual threat - so I did okay.

A nice song then. A fucking bastard to play though.

### **GIRLFRIEND CLOTHES**

There was very little to do in South Shields where I grew up as a kid so you were always on the hunt for a free thrill. And nothing bettered a kiss and a grope at the bus stop while waiting for the bus home from your girlfriend's house. Buses would come and go while you were still at it. Naturally you'd miss the last one home and

have to walk. Tradition dictated that at this point you'd get in a fight. Or at least chased up the road with a mouthful of insults hurled from gangs of guys back from a night out on the lash in town. Presumably to find girls, predictably unsuccessfully.

The irony of this situation—drunken hard men together, yelling homophobic insults at kids who'd missed the bus due to getting passionate with their girlfriend—never left me. It was only a matter of time until I'd write a song about it.

Stuck together with an Abba-style rhythm, it's one that I still enjoy playing to this day. Obviously the naivety of the lyrics isn't lost on me now that I have children of my own. Still, nothing wrong in charting one's growth through song. It's a sweet tune too.

### **AND THE BULLSHIT GOES ON**

Another of the songs that didn't make it out of the 'Earth Vs' recording sessions. This was originally called 'Just Stay', a well-intentioned love song that lacked direction. I was fond of the basic structure so I adopted it for a very different kind of song altogether: a direct attack on the record label.

When it was finished, I recall someone from the label sat at the speakers nodding in time to the beat, as we sniggered in a cloud of hash smoke behind him, convinced that the lyrics were soaring over his head. In retrospect I'm quite sure they weren't. I've also little doubt that East/West Records were every bit as tired of me – as I was of them.

Naivety was steering the boat all the way. I hadn't yet received the knocks to be authentically world-weary but the arrangement showed a maturity in the writing that led me to believe I might still have some fuel in the tank. Far from running out of ideas, I was thinking of ways to approach arranging from polar perspectives, given my limited tools of trade at the time. Namely a guitar.

I loved recording B-sides, often more than albums. A quick rehearsal and then three days of drunken mayhem at a studio. Great! Fuck promotion, I was beginning to live for the studio and our label were welcome to take as many singles from the albums as they liked. Just as long as our management kept the booze coming.

### **BEAUTIFUL THING YOU**

Another single, this time 'Suckerpunch', and another set of B-sides. Jumping ahead a few months, by this point the band were starting to show signs of tour fatigue. We'd get back for a day or two where I'd write three more songs then zip off to the studio to record them before getting picked up by the bus and taken back on tour. Okay, it's unfair to blame the workload for any dip in spirits; it was more to do with the partylode. We were existing on a steady diet of Jack Daniel's, speed, hash and cocaine. Eating was cheating.

When we were dropped off at Parr St Studios in Liverpool, we were down to a three-piece. Ritch had been taken to hospital for exhaustion and Wolfsbane's Steve Danger was filling in for studio rehearsal. After a check-up and overnight stay, Ritch

was back in the morning, but it was evident that all was not emotionally well within the band. But even I couldn't have predicted how low things would go in such a short space of time.

The song was written around a riff/chord progression that I'd wanted to use for years (inspired by 'The Good Rats' 'Tough Guys') and once I put pen to paper, the song bled out easily. This sometimes happens and still I always doubt the quality of anything written with such ease. Ironic since the songs that come easiest are the ones most easily digested. A sudden writing spree of three or four songs at once is something I never take for granted. They're almost sure to be fan favourites.

### TWO-WAY IDIOT MIRROR

Another case in point, written in the same afternoon as 'Beautiful Thing You', this snappy little fellow was not so much a little cheesy as the entire cheeseboard. It's levelled only by a caustic lyric regarding judgmental people – a recurring source of aggravation that's served me well. Even when memory blocks out the darker aspects of the past, it's important to shoehorn the misery back into the picture for some context. Mainly to see how far I'd come.

I don't consider happiness a goal, but an essential part of our design. Happiness is our birthright and moving away from poisonous relationships is another step in the right direction to finding ours.

I love that this song almost entirely uses major chords. I used to think – naively so – that people in tune with their sadness tended to gravitate towards positive chords in music, and vice-versa. Given the obvious geographical and environmental involvement in our cultural tastes, I still maintain that I would have been drawn to the same basic melodic structures had I been born in Africa. But I would have probably just not used an electric guitar.

### 29 x THE PAIN

As the first two 'Suckerpunch' B-sides were already written (namely 'Two Way Idiot Mirror' and 'Beautiful Thing You'), I was given a free weekend at home to come up with another. I had no idea what to write about and was suffering from a bout of depression bad enough to obliterate tasks entirely.

With my flatmate Ray gone for the weekend, I was left alone with a CD he'd been given to review for *Kerrang!* magazine. It was something I'd been eyeing favourably in a Camden record shop for weeks and I'd regretted not taking a deaf plunge into investment for the tour bus. It was an album by the Lee Harvey Oswald Band called 'A Taste Of Prison'. Once I'd pulled together the courage to listen, I found that it would change my life. No-one expects that when you hear a new band for the first time.

Depression is a very debilitating illness that will no doubt flavour this book throughout. Suffice to say, I needed this album to be good, very good, or we were both alone in a very bad place indeed. From the opening ragged, searing, "fuck you" guitar swipes, the power of music once again provided medicinal, spiritual and deeply emotional sustenance.

The album dragged me to my feet, poured me a stiff drink, stuck the guitar in my hand and – in an all-night writing session – I had finished the required extra B-side, ‘29 x The Pain’ (minus one line of lyrics) plus ‘Sky Babies’, a 13 minute epic. When I was finished, I packed a bag, jumped in the shower and was ready for my lift to the studio.

After hastily rehearsing the three songs, we retreated to the residential side of the studio where the depression kicked back in with ten times the force of its previous visit. I remember lying on the floor for hours, utterly unable to move, thoughts on nothing but suicide. Eventually morning came and it was time to record the song. It was complete except for that final line. Walking into the studio with the gait of a man on borrowed time, the mood inside was surprisingly equally sombre. It turned out that during that night, Kurt Cobain had killed himself. The grief was overwhelming but shared by everyone. We attacked the three songs with a passion we seldom saw again. To this day, those are the best sounding songs I've ever been a part of recording. I can only attribute it to the passion in the performances. Collective yet separate and entirely personal. A real bond. A real band.

I loved Kurt Cobain and I was going to miss him every bit as much as I would a friend. I still do, especially after being lucky enough to play guitar with Courtney Love on numerous tours. The missing line of the song wrote itself: “I'm going to miss Kurt Cobain, like 29 x The Pain”.

I experience music as a tangible companion because it is the sound of feelings become manifest. The marketing of music is akin to the privatisation of air – which may also happen in our lifetimes. Music in its commercial form is designed to bypass its importance in the human experience. Even deny it altogether.

Business that would deflate what you write in order to attract more consumers is a flatline relationship with music. Remove the human interaction and all the mainstream has to offer in place is money. Music represents something more ancient than us – let alone more important than cash – and will exist long after there is any need for either. Even in the sounds of wind and the voices of birds, it will exist in the very source from where it came.

As a side note, the 29 in the title is in no relation to the amount of bands mentioned in the song (I think there were 27). I'm not entirely sure what the 29 stands for. Possibly the age I was when I wrote it? I gather it was also the 29th song that we released.

### HATE THE WORLD DAY

If we had been a more successful band, we would have been taken out of commission at this point – and stuck in rehab for a short spell. Like those big US bands. We would have undergone a physical, emotional, mental and spiritual top-up. We were burned out and needed a break. But as a band in demand – despite still living below the



breadline – our rent wasn't going to get paid unless those tickets and t-shirts got sold. So the hamster wheel started up again. The irony being that we were never even home to warrant expensive London rental charges. But I digress...

Studio, tour, write, studio, tour, write. We loved it – who wouldn't? It was the lifestyle our heroes had carved out for us. And although our heroes probably got management-enforced health breaks, at least our management were getting as fucked up as we were. There was no problem that another line couldn't fix. Not yet anyway. Our dealers were our doctors and our crew were our counsellors. Within that, I internalised my anger and fears and began a slow transformation. I started believing that my anger was real and that hate was an inevitable part of my make-up. These days even the word 'hate' looks strange to me, but back then it was the very fuel that I thought ran the truck.

'Hate The World Day' was another automatic song that began by chugging on an open string (like 'Action' by Sweet or 'Now I'm Here' by Queen) and ended some seven minutes later having ventured around whichever port and passageway of my brain into which this intro fancied drilling.

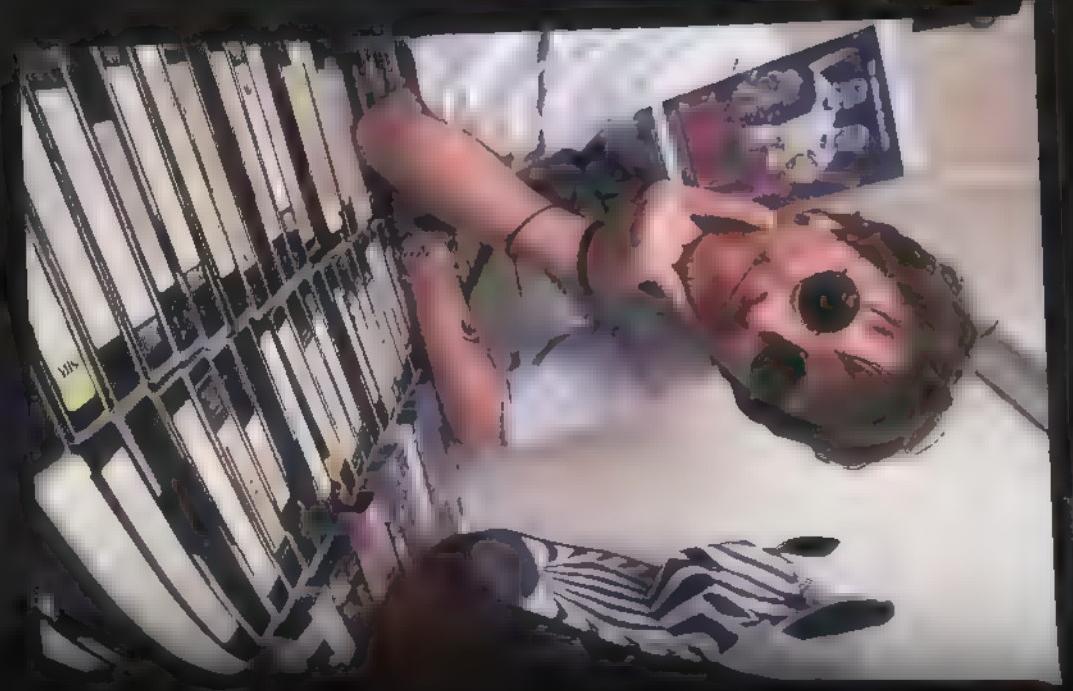
At this stage of development as a writer, I was able to charter flights of drug-induced fancy, put down the guitar and remember every lick and lyric the next day. I still can sometimes – just with a clearer head. I have no memory for birthdays, names and important details of every kind, but I can keep a ten-minute arrangement in my head for years. I guess everyone has a couple of skills.

#### FIRM UP

I would have sworn an oath that hashish was saving me from a life of crime. Possibly murder. Most probably my own. Effectively dead-bolting myself away from society, I was forging an evil alliance with every ill thought that sane folk sensibly discarded. I celebrated the dark side and wallowed within its empty halls. I loved being weird, feeling different to everyone around me. Making normal people feel uncomfortable. For me it was a badge of honour, a club that I'd meet a member of every now and again. I'd consider this perfectly acceptable and par for the course. Loneliness was part of the deal for me.

Depression was a fairly reliable companion in these times and music was the escape from the dark place that was largely of my own creation. Our crew and management were hard touring men and I wanted to be like them. Mental illness had no place aboard this ship. You sucked it down and you got on with the job. So I continued depositing my anger into a hate-filled piggy bank that seemed safe enough – just as long as you fed piggy plenty of drugs and alcohol as ballast. The bank wasn't entirely fit for breaking. Not just yet anyway.

Sat by my huge bong, this sprawling ode to cannabis and hashish was written. I lived to get into the studio during touring breaks and see new material come to life. There was little point in going home. Hatred was home. The bus was home. The band was home. The lifestyle was home. You can hear it in the music: we were entirely comfortable with our lot. It was still a good time – it just happened to be getting darker by the day.



Where I fire  
CJ, almost kill Ritch,  
go to war with  
East/West Records,  
nearly lose an arm,  
buy a horse and help  
get it inseminated,  
kill a tramp and  
set fire to the  
Chelsea Hotel.



## I WANNA GO WHERE THE PEOPLE GO

The story begins to wander a little here as songs were written in an entirely different order to that of their release. I had intended 'PHUQ' to be a double album - something to blow the debut out of the water - so I'd written it as such. The label disagreed and wanted something identical to the debut. I solemnly promised East/West and stated in every press interview that I would never simply remake a previous album. I fully intended every Wildhearts album to be different and unique on its own merit.

East/West didn't like the longer songs and refused to include them on the album. Instead they 'gave' us the songs - which we released as the fanclub-only mini-album, 'Fishing For Luckies'. Eager for the arrival of our second album, the press picked up on this fanclub release and reviewed it very favourably. East/West noticed the positive reviews then decided they wanted to release 'Fishing For Luckies' instead - after initially refusing the songs. Which underlined my intention for the second album to be a more mature effort. At this point, I refused any communication with East/West. I completely isolated myself and began a steady spiral into depression, self-harm and intended suicide. It kinda began like this...

Between rehearsing, recording and seemingly endless live work, we were given a few days back home. During one night at the old Marquee club, I bumped into CJ's then-girlfriend - a very pretty girl who had attracted the amorous intentions of some US rock star at the bar. I was there with my friends, she with hers. So with CJ absent, it was up to me to deal with the problem. After a comical double-take, I realised the rock star in question was Joey DeMaio of Manowar - a very muscular man. But mercifully short. I loved the first Manowar album (featuring 'The Dictators' Ross The Boss), so I managed to deal with the problem fairly quickly. Joey turned out to be quite the gent, with whom I shared a beer.

Later on at the dinner table at Comforts Place studios in Surrey, an argument about the situation escalated into a potentially physical confrontation. Somehow the Joey DeMaio episode - fuck knows how or why - had morphed into a story about how I had immoral intentions towards CJ's girlfriend. Something that had never crossed my mind since I was in a relationship at the time (it may surprise some of you, but I'm an honourable man). A bottle of alcohol was produced and I chased CJ around the dinner table - brandishing the bottle as a weapon. That was it: our relationship (already strained to breaking point by cocaine use, ego and an ongoing passive-aggressive competitive streak that never made sense to me) finally had its life support plug yanked from the wall.

So we became a three-piece band. We then found ourselves in New York City, looking for a new guitarist to film a video for 'I Wanna Go Where The People Go'. On a flatbed truck driving around the streets of NY - without a permit. But during the entire period of filming, not one police officer stopped us. I can only assume they figured we'd already obtained a district filming permit from where we drove from or where we were heading.

In fact the only incident of the day was when a crew member (hey, Booma!) left the van unguarded in Union Square Park to join us for a sneaky beer. Being New York at the turn of the 90s - still a more lawless place than its shiny upgraded veneer would suggest - the van was broken into. Within minutes the gear was stolen, sold

on – and most probably – shot up into someone's arm. The equipment included the brand-new custom-made "Smiley Bones" guitar that appears in the video. Never to return. Didn't even get a chance to plug the fucking thing in.

The unfortunate tech was to learn the first of two very valuable lessons. Firstly, don't leave gear unattended in the middle of NYC. Secondly, don't take magic mushrooms with strangers. Fairly soon (following a very odd evening with a lovely dwarf called Bobby) our hapless tech Booma (the very fella instructed to look after us) was on his way back home via the next flight to the UK.

Which left three reprobates to our own devices in a big, dirty city. We accidentally set fire to the Chelsea Hotel one evening. (The incident occurred after we successfully procured drugs at the same park from which the equipment was stolen.) The hotel's proprietor was entirely unfazed. He informed me that Andy Warhol and Sid Vicious had already beaten us to it. That's some good company.

We also inadvertently assisted in the death of a bum. A lovely chap to whom we chatted every day. It transpired he wasn't homeless after all. One day it was the fellow's birthday so we chipped in a decent amount of cash, which he promised to spend on hookers and coke. How were we to know that he had an apartment and a partner who would find him at home with the girls? Asking his whereabouts the next day, we discovered his partner had set fire to their place and he was the only one who didn't make it out alive.

There are a host of Wildhearts stories about NYC alone that would make a fascinating book in itself. But this time, our exile from the UK was to be short-lived. Our management would eventually starve us into returning for an appearance on *Top Of The Pops* to support the aforementioned 'I Wanna Go Where The People Go'. Back home, the song had apparently become a hit in our absence. Broke and defeated, we returned as ordered.

The first song playing as we sourly boarded a taxi at Heathrow airport? 'I Wanna Go Where The People Go'. Written around a guitar riff that I'd been messing with at soundchecks, the chorus fell into place and the rest of the song pretty much wrote itself. This was the first time I suspected outside forces were assisting in my writing. It was also the first time I'd written something that I thought was genuinely complete. BBC Radio 1 DJ Chris Evans liked it so much he played the song every day, just after starting as presenter on the flagship breakfast show. He tried to force the listeners to make it a No.1. It was a sweet gesture, but failed miserably.

## V DAY

Prior to legging it to New York, I'd undergone a very serious bout of depression which almost led to my suicide.

I'd always admired my stepfather's old Ford Cortina. One day I became the proud owner of this handsome car. It must have been the last leaded-petrol guzzler on the road and it became the inspiration behind my suicide attempt. One night, a friend and I had taken some valium. We intended to get good and wasted before attaching a pipe to the exhaust of the car and poisoning ourselves. It was a plan that was as clear and decisive as any I've ever had.

My friend - with a lower tolerance for narcotics than myself - was knocked out by the pills. So I was left to commit the act solo. But I decided I didn't want to leave my friend to wake up alone in the world. So in an attempt to feel something - anything - I began stubbing out lit cigarettes on my arm. Sixty cigarettes later I had a huge smiley face scar burned into my arm. According to my friend, experienced in such things, I wore the eyes of a corpse.

It was this corpse that ignored the advice to go to a hospital to get the wound treated. Instead I jumped on a flight to New York and allowed the wound to get severely infected. I was asked to leave a restaurant in Manhattan because the pungent stench of my rotten flesh was so strong. Eventually I saw a professional about the - now very ugly - infection. Going visibly white, he told me that he didn't think I would be able to keep the arm.

Back home, my girlfriend at the time - who conveniently was a nurse - cleaned out the infected area with alcohol and wire wool in order to inspect the damage. She then immediately sent me to hospital where the arm was saved. Unless one day I'll be able to give birth, cleaning out the rotten flesh will remain the single most painful experience of my life. But I was still alive. Another great lesson had come with an equally great price. A theme was forming...

Penned around my love of both the Cardiacs and ABBA, 'V Day' fought for life every step of the way. I guess I wanted to write it more than it wanted to be written. I didn't really believe in a 'victory' of any sort at the time. Even in the studio, after a full backing track had been recorded, I still had no lyrics and doubted it would ever be finished. Cash was being ploughed into the recording sessions but my depression was eating up the studio time - with a complete disregard for budget.

At a time when danger seemed the very fabric of my existence, I wrapped my car around a tree - with Ritch Battersby sitting next to me. We'd been drinking steadily all morning and needed to get to the nearest liquor store to restock - a trek we would never complete. Running from the scene of the crime, we avoided capture as the police report apparently described a skinhead and a Rasta. The last thing the helicopter was looking for was a red-headed Rastafarian and a short-haired fellow wearing rock clothes.

So I escaped. Again, by the skin of my teeth and with the luck of the damned. Ritch wasn't so lucky; he was taken to hospital for various injuries while I drunkenly sweet-talked the police into not arresting me.

I still have no idea how I successfully managed to pull off this coup. But I'm reliably informed that I tried to arrange a date with the female police officer.

Victory then - I'm sure you will agree - was a constant if silent companion, although unbeknownst to myself at the time. I'm still not sure about 'V Day', though. It's a good recording of a Frankenstein's monster of a song. It boasts false bravado in the face of unlikely emotional odds. Completing the track was a victory in itself. It was certainly a departure from the usual woe-is-me approach to songs discussing depression. Instead, its braggadocio reveals very little about the writer or the subject matter by favouring a football terrace-mentality. Nice chorus though...

## JUST IN LUST

Another add-water-and-mix pop/rock tune, the type that I enjoy writing. We were rehearsing new songs for the intended second album at a semi-converted stable, with the familiar clip-clop of horses providing a comforting soundtrack. Ritch and I even bought our own horse, which we unimaginatively named Miss Wildheart. We took pity on the nag, at the time fit for the glue factory, when we spotted her while on a recon mission to score some pot at a nearby farm. After buying the filly we brought her home and watched in utter amazement as she floated gracefully around a field. The stable owner instantly recognised this equine bag of bones as a previous champion called Spinnaker. She'd been taken out of action because she was only capable of bearing twins - apparently a bad thing in the racing game. She was allowed to live at the stable where - as her benefactor - I was forced to hold her chest as she was inseminated by a huge stud horse. Missing his first entry, the stud's sperm flew right over my shoulder. But the second attempt was successful. I was disturbed to find out that horses make a very human sound when being fucked.

Anyway, I digress. We were rehearsing the album and I was writing new songs faster than we could learn the ones already written. It was all good stuff. Or at least I thought it was. Surely we would be able to get the double album idea green-lit? This was prior to the New York visit and the future really did seem positive. CJ was still in the band and we even had a security guy who would put some of us through our paces and run off the hangovers for maximum creative output - causing untold bouts of collective vomiting. But we were dedicated and serious. Once upon a time.

As a fairly unrelated side note, video budgets were obscene at the time. I was determined to do something memorable - at least for me - with the funds for 'Just In Lust'. A Scottish TV show of the time called *Absolutely* showcased genius comedy turns from the likes of John Sparkes and Peter Baikie. Both appeared in the video as well as some of the show's incredible animation sequences - which were effective at channelling Monty Python. I wanted to replicate the show's energy for our video. Something ridiculous like £50,000 was spent on this silly promo which was shown on TV just twice.

These mindless promotional films - although essential in an MTV age - tended to do more harm than good. They showed seasoned musicians with zero acting skills in front of a camera to advertise their music, often with all the grace of a dancing tramp. It was an aspect of mainstream acceptance I couldn't understand. I routinely begged for promo films to be featurettes that didn't involve our awkward-looking band at all.

Looking back, I can't see how this, my suggested approach, could have done any more harm in flogging our tunes than my embarrassed scowl mugging up the screen. But video was king and contracts were contracts.

## BABY STRANGE

Written in the creative blizzard that was the 'Shitsville' sessions - composed before the first album was even released. I wanted to get the jump on constructing the double-barrelled opus that would be 'PHUQ'.

A double album: something even rock bands didn't dare attempt at a time when indie ruled the airwaves? Surely this would separate us from that whinging, floppy-fringed college fodder once and for all? We'd finally stand above our contemporaries as sonic giants in comparison like Metallica upon the release of 'Master Of Puppets'. Unfortunately they had released 'Metallica' (the 'Black' album) by this point. If any references were to be made about Metallica it would be with regard to the huge success of this album and their silly macho posturing videos, rather than their artistic peak as a band.

My world and the corporate world were never destined to tie together amicably: collision was an eventuality. 'Baby Strange' was intended to be sandwiched on the double album midway between the first song, 'Inglorious' and the closer, 'Sky Babies'. It would be track one, side three, dovetailing into 'Nita Nitro' – which was written on the same day about the same girl – to keep the energy flowing.

When the record company scrapped the idea of a double album, I wasn't hurt or confused, I was fucking livid and refused to even speak to them again. Messages would be sent via third parties while I'd regularly get the audience to chant "Fuck East/West" at any gig broadcast on live radio. In fact I still think that 'Earth Vs', 'PHUQ' (including the tracks from 'Fishing For Luckies') and 'Endless Nameless' could have been a one-two-three attack that would have successfully branded our name on the map and sealed our place in the history books.

'Baby Strange' was a very automatic song; the chord arrangement evolved as a stream of sub-consciousness. While I love songs written with such ease, I struggle to fully accept a writing credit. Occasionally songs are merely bits of string hanging from invisible balloons that the writer's emotional radar simply locates and pulls gently. Sometimes there really isn't any more to it than that.

#### NITA NITRO

Written on the same edge of the couch whilst looking at the same crack in the wall, I remember this arriving as effortlessly as its predecessor. It's possibly my least favourite song to play live, but as a fan favourite, I find myself performing it a lot. I can only assume people are drawn to the opening drum pattern. Note to self: people like drum patterns to open songs.

Written for disc two, side three of the double album, its chirpy whistling intro was intended to keep the spirits of listeners aloft during such an intense audio workout. Sadly, it took three years for anyone to hear it after it was originally written. Perhaps that has something to do with my dislike for it? Instead of being a classy deep cut on a sprawling double album feast, it became a stand-out track on a single album. Imagine the second side of 'Abbey Road' being bullied into featuring neat endings to every song? Or Damien Hirst's *Mother And Child Divided* being presented as a full cow on the insistence of the Venice Biennale?

The words "No, you can't have a double album" still ring in my ears like the scolding of an impatient teacher. Like a wayward child being admonished and locked indoors due to parental distrust of the outside world. I don't think I ever got over being denied artistic license at a time when songs were pouring out of me. But as I sit here

writing this, the original incarnation of East/West is now a dead institution and a distant memory within a lost industry. I really should thank that hapless bunch of arseholes for fuelling the fortitude that drives me now. Hell, even this annoying song lived longer than East/West Records originally did.

### **JONESING FOR JONES**

Written in the studio as we were laying down the backing tracks of what would be the second album, ‘Jonesing For Jones’ was shoehorned into the session on the strength of the chorus. This was the final song recorded as part of the PHUQ sessions after many of the others were already finished and ready to mix. Songs were racing through me like thoughts through a little kid’s mind. Here I was with the use of a major recording studio – effectively the keys to a very exclusive toy shop. Given my position, who wouldn’t have grabbed the opportunity with both hands and held on for the love of sanity?

CJ was gone and I was recording all of the guitars on the songs. With Willie Dowling present to help with any harmonies above my range, we marched onwards in blissful ignorance of increasing studio bills. A typical day would see us recording all night and I would surface some time the next afternoon to see if any of the drunken parts were keepers. The hours suited me perfectly. But it must be said – with the benefit of hindsight – that working like this must have been hell for everyone else concerned. While they were undoubtedly treacherous times, I saw it as survival – a state of necessity that brought out the best in me.

‘Jones’ was the surname of the nurse girlfriend who cleaned the infected wounds on my burned arm, quite possibly, saving the limb. Our relationship was born during the Love/Hate tour. It was before the advent of the web – back when relationships were formed via Royal Mail. Postcards were emails. Instead of commenting on someone’s status, or dropping them an instant message, I’d simply write a song about how they were occupying my thoughts.

The song explores the comparisons between new love and a drug habit. While I saw it as classic Wildhearts in approach and topic – a steadfast refusal to just write a simple love song – I was gutted to see it compared to Oasis in a subsequent review. Oasis had spectacularly captured the zeitgeist during the interim between the recording of ‘PHUQ’ and its subsequent release a year later. We were always one step short of boarding the ship that was leaving the jetty.

### **WOAH SHIT, YOU GOT THROUGH**

Back to those little punk blasts that I love. This time the theme was concerned with how subtle yet irresistible a force love is – even when it was allowed to enter such a barren host as myself at the time. It was approached with typically caustic humour which was usually based around comedy scrapping with tragedy. In no time I had gone from a hardened road animal to a lovesick puppy, missing the warmth of a partner and praying for some time off. Which never, ever came.

The middle section was merely a piss-take to further establish our staunch refusal to be a typical rock band. We were deliberately difficult: we prided ourselves on being unmarketable.

At this point, hemmed in by work and cushioned by narcotics and alcohol, I had grown fearful of everything outside of my bubble. Not least my public persona. I wasn't comfortable with being a rock star. Which was ironic at a time when the world desperately needed rock stars. I resented not waiting a little longer to find the lead singer I'd dreamed about. In my guise as reluctant frontman, I refused to accept the role in the traditional manner by fronting it out. Instead I'd be different, difficult.

I probably came across as more petulant than problematic or anarchic. The truth is, I was experiencing the first of some serious mental problems throughout this period. Something that would be brushed aside and left to fester until later – some years later in fact – when these dormant issues would manifest as life-threatening problems.

So began the self-consuming task of disappearing from all things outside of the band. Especially anything of a promotional or social nature, but even the gentle trappings of love. I was beginning to self-destruct. A leisurely process that, had anyone noticed, could have been easily avoided with some counselling and a bit of time off. But ours was a hardy bunch, and no-one in our organisation was going to show a weakness such as concern. We wanted to be pirates and pirates didn't care for each other. Surely that must have been the lowest of all forms of communication? Caring suggested affection and affection indicated weakness. At least it did in the distorted version of reality that we mistook for rock 'n' roll.

### COLD PATOOTIE TANGO

Another segue written into the song so that we could record two songs at the same time – something for which I was hoping to develop a natural taste and talent. I couldn't think of any other bands that recorded "double songs" as standard. So I figured anything unusual that we found comfortable would help harness a style of our own. I loved Metallica and Queen instrumental pieces and with a band member short, I wanted to show off the musicianship of the group as a three-piece. In fact, if we'd have been allowed a double album, I can see that we may have stayed as a three-piece; probably becoming more musically adventurous as a result.

Originally intended to be instrumental, naturally I decided that this would be an instrumental with a difference: it would feature vocals. I guess the theme of being a non-conformist overwhelmed me to the point where I crammed a few lyrics in there to further compound the point that I was even refusing to conform to myself. Fighting with myself and winning – with predictably futile results – was a sport I'd go on to develop over the next decade.

Sometimes I don't have much choice which way a song wants to evolve. Instead I act as a conduit for its wily intentions. I like it when this happens – it makes me feel like I'm writing by agreeable committee. I continue to search for this committee in real life (although I come pretty close when writing with Jon Poole and Denzel). I often let songs write themselves and refuse to be a critic. I have no idea – to this day – which ones will be listener favourites. All I can guarantee is that my favourites will differ entirely from yours. In fact, if I like a song very much, I can expect it will be largely ignored by listeners. I'm almost 100% on the money with this theory.

Right after 'Earth Vs The Wildhearts' was finished and being mastered, I woke up early one morning with this riff in my head and the word "caprice" urgently bugging me to look it up in my dictionary. I left school very early and became largely self-taught. I paid little attention whilst actually at school and I'll confess to not being impressively armed with grammatical nous. As a child, many was the time that a word would enter my head - either picked up from movies or TV - and I'd dash around asking anyone within earshot, "What does this mean?"

Such questions were usually met with derision, plain confusion or just instructions to "go and ask someone else". Being fascinated by words that even grown-ups didn't know simply bolstered my love of language. I still write entire songs inspired by learning a new word - common but new to me.

Back then I'd carry around a huge Oxford English Dictionary and thesaurus as both educational tools and writing companions. Dog-eared corners, pages grubby with circled words and scribbled notes, my books followed me everywhere. Rummaging around my freshly ditched tour bag, in the dark, I discovered that "caprice" meant everything I hoped it would - from unaccountable mood swings to a lively piece of music. This new word was closer to describing my life than I could have imagined. I still have no idea why it was given to me that morning. This kind of thing would happen again and again, most memorably with my solo album title 'Valor Del Corazon'. Words enter my consciousness not as sounds, but as large letters. This would go on to further inform me as a musician and even save my life in years to come.

'Caprice' is a great song to play live, but not an easy one to get right. I've tried nailing this with drummers playing it too fast, or bass players getting lost in its arrangement. Unless Ritch Battersby is behind the drum kit, 'Caprice' tends to come off as a confused mess of equally confusing ideas. Ritch is still the most reliable drummer I've ever played with and this was the song when I realised we spoke in a secret musical code that few could decipher.

#### **BE MY DRUG**

This track was written about my ongoing issues with loneliness, monogamy and groupies. For single men or bare-faced liars, the road comes with well-documented perks - the most traditional of which is the lure of new, unchartered female company in every town. A travelling smorgasbord of mysterious delights, I've watched people remove wedding rings in the pursuit of sex. I've seen others fish for company with nothing but a backstage pass or a few magazine features as bait. But it works. As popular as it is, I find it equally lonely and sad. Still, you'll find more than enough lazy musicians in this business who can't be bothered to thoroughly learn songs, but few will miss a photo session.

I couldn't do it, even as a young buck. I loved my girlfriend and I got into this business to write and play music - as do many songwriters - regardless of what some bloated, self-important rock stars may say to the contrary. The honour was mine and I valued it. Back then it seemed naive and idealistic to people around me, but then the people around me weren't putting their thoughts into songs. Maybe they'd have had more of a conscience if they were forced into translating their thoughts into a

#### **CAPRICE**

tune? I guess my thoughts had to be honest if they were to be authentic enough for people to believe in them. Pathologically honest, as it turned out.

I wasn't necessarily being faithful to my girlfriend at the time as much as I was to myself and my songs. But coming home from a tour germ-free was a good feeling. If I expected truth to light the way then I had to represent what I wanted from life. I'd adopt this stance with every stage of my development and I continue to develop it with age. It's what has provided me with hundreds of songs worth of inspiration. How many songs can a bare-faced liar actually write? The truth is all there is. Being true to yourself and living with a peaceful heart is the only logical path to happiness. I later found this to be the law. Back then I had no idea - I was just following instinct.

Since this period I've seen so many people's lives dragged down to who and what they really are - regardless of what they claim to be. It's a mantra I adopted early and maintain to this day. You are what you do, not what you say you do. While I've traditionally associated the word 'drug' with euphoria or habit, ultimately a drug is something that cushions the blow of reality. Without trying to romanticise hedonism, I've taken pretty much every drug available. But the truth cushions blows more effectively than anything else I've tried.

### **NAIVETY PLAY**

Another song about East/West Records and the corporate music world in general. The hatred was compounding and hardening into something that wouldn't be easily shifted. After finishing up in Comforts Place with Mark Dodson, we would finish recording in London with Al Clay. He told us about working with Frank Black (also known as Black Francis when playing in the Pixies). Apparently Frank would arrive in the studio most mornings with new compositions that the band would learn and record that afternoon. Songs for the 'PHUQ' session were flooding out of me so I started bringing in new songs to the studio. Ritch and Danny had little difficulty in picking up the new arrangements - testament to the chemistry we'd developed as a result of our intense studio work over the last two years.

Now recording comfortably as a three-piece, I wanted to write something that would be easy to play live but also showcased how brutally tight we were as a unit. (This unit would soon begin to disintegrate and eventually devolve into a mockery of a once-proud group, but back then we were frankly devastating.) 'Naivety Play' was effortlessly effective in showing what a great groove we had.

I'd been nervous about playing things too simple but Al Clay's story introduced a more devil may-care attitude onto which I happily latched. In retrospect, I wonder if East/West had eagerly extended our recording sessions in the hope that I might write a snappy, poppy single for the single album they wanted? Instead of yet more grist to a punk/metal version of Pink Floyd's 'The Wall'? Naivety, wishful thinking, or maybe both. Either way I got East/West's intentions completely wrong and would soon discover just to what level.

### **IN LILLY'S GARDEN**

A very innocent song. Since it appeared, I'm constantly asked what it's really about. The truth is so mundane as to be almost embarrassing. When Ray and I decided to

get a flat together – a place in which to party 24 hours a day and a short walk from Camden Town – we didn't bargain on the additional bonus of Lilly. An amazing old lady, she lived downstairs and always had time for a chat with the two drunken reprobates from the flat above.

We loved her so much that we buried any pet of ours that died – hamsters, rats, gerbils – in the garden in front of her flat. We imagined that the thoughts of her looking out of her window over their graves would cast a loving energy to our deceased loved ones. The song was as much about the relationship I shared with the animals as the actual pet cemetery where they ultimately resided.

It was one of those songs that takes familiar chord structures yet still yields something original by the nature of conveying fresh and strong emotions. As a writer, few things are more rewarding than reusing well-worn chord structures. Or 'eco-writing' if you want to be a wanker about it.

This track was pencilled in as a single which didn't come to fruition. While the band's fortunes were looking doubtful by this point, the song grew as a fan-favourite deep cut. A shame as I would have loved to have seen a 'Sowing The Seeds Of Love' type video to accompany this melancholy little composition. An idea which East/West would have no doubt disagreed with me over anyway.

## GETTING IT

Never intended to be the closing song, the scream of "shut up" at the end (admirably performed by the wife of our then-manager) would prove to be both prophetic and ironic.

The howls of anguish in the vocals reflect both my all-encompassing love for Hüsker Dü and my utter helplessness at the maw of the huge machine that was chewing up our ideals like so much land development.

I was determined that the fans shouldn't be made to suffer the fallout of our crumbling label relations by the release of a sub-standard album. Which is how I interpreted the single album version of 'PHUQ' in comparison to my lofty intentions. I'd requested a strike by the band and crew but was met with a more practical suggestion of compromise. Let the label win this battle, but carry on with the war and fight to set up my own imprint, Round Records.

I can confirm that accepting defeat really didn't work. With the wind taken from our sails, we never fully recovered our gang-like mentality and unity. If I'm being completely honest, people relied on us for our reputation as much as the songs. People believed that The Wildhearts 2.0 still retained a fire, but we knew it to be mere embers. If 'PHUQ' had been allowed to remain as a double album I'm convinced it would have propelled the band to a status more befitting my ambitions.

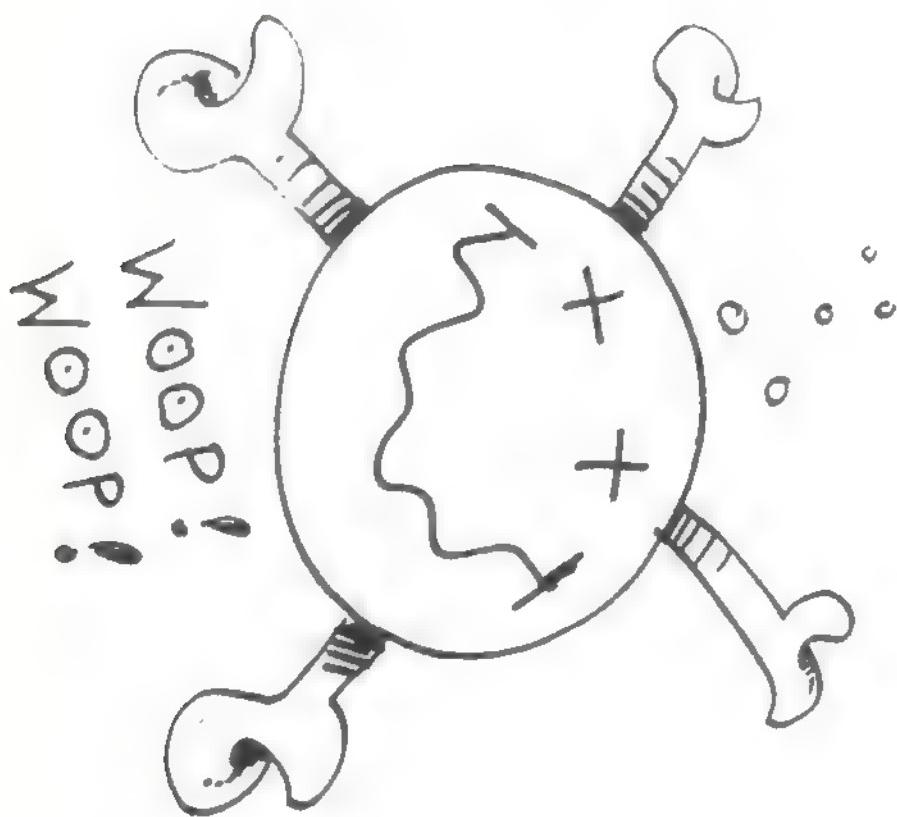
We'd been told by the US department of our label that we were "too punk" before the release of our first album and that "punk would never happen in the USA". If they had instead fully backed The Wildhearts then our album would have been all over US radio six months before the imminent punk explosion in the US –

led by Green Day and The Offspring. (Incidentally, we were also told we were "too powerful" by the same A&R man after he came to see us supporting of all bands - Pantera). Now we were being told that we were "too ambitious" in an era that would be dominated by Britpop and defined as a singles era. Soon afterwards we were denied the opportunity to be an "album band" - whilst sitting on a powerful double album - because our singles weren't selling well enough.

I learnt a lot of lessons from this painful period in my life. The most important was to never compromise and never chase trends. Both are the ideals of those destined to be led, dominated and - ultimately - disappointed. Since then I've stuck to my guns when all around have pleaded with me to just play ball. As such, I've strode out in front - often with no one behind me. But I'd rather plough a lonely furrow than see nothing but the backs of guileless, shameless and spineless followers. At least the view is better.

#### DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME (hidden track)

A piece of fluff that, to this day, I have no idea where I wrote it or the circumstances around recording it. So it's with spectacular irony that this is the one piece of my music - from hundreds of songs - still sang back to me by audiences from the UK to the USA to Japan. It's universally loved by everyone who hears it. I imagine it will be inscribed on my tombstone.





CHAPTER TWO B:  
PHUQ  
THE B-SIDES

**SHAWTY HANG**

The title, stolen from my then girlfriend, is apparently a Welsh term for things going wrong, which couldn't have been more suitable for the period at this time. It was the early 90s, Seattle was still news and rock bands outside of its geographical radius were deemed unmarketable. It was pathetic. Perfectly good bands were turning themselves into fey indie vehicles or sporting united Dr Marten's with lumberjack shirts as belts. Magazines featured gurning poster boys, all vocalists sounded like Eddie Vedder and producers wanted guitars to sound polite. I fucking hated it all. I'd spend hours arguing with engineers about the guitar levels while refusing to give more "attitude" to vocal takes. And the looks I'd get when suggesting a keyboard sound be used to bolster riffs? Priceless.

So I'd end up pissing off the recording engineer. He'd leave the studio and I'd mess with the faders until the levels seemed appropriate. He'd cool down, come back and tell me it sounded like a fucking racket. And finally we'd agree on something.

I'd get annoyed quickly by producers/engineers insisting they knew what was best for the band based on past experience. What a lazy fucking insult. I've seen plenty of bands' careers handed to the lions because they blindly trusted people claiming to be experts. Yet people like Sonic Youth, The Jesus And Mary Chain, The Fall and Flaming Lips would cruise merrily along powered by their own conviction, uncontaminated by professional advice. I was on their side.

When it comes down to it, you have to believe in yourself and fuck all the experts. With all due respect.

**CAN'T DO RIGHT FOR DOING WRONG**

Another impromptu and gloriously unhinged recording session that yielded great results. In fact it wasn't only East/West's mercurial marketing strategies that were getting messy at this point; everything was starting to obey the chaos. However, the music was benefitting from the sporadic release of singles. Which meant, of course, more B-sides: a reliable grinding stone on which to sharpen my creative sword. But it was rapidly becoming clear that a break would have been a very good idea at this point. And it wasn't going to come.

Rushed into a cheap studio in Muswell Hill to record this song, we completed a set of B-sides for the single 'I Wanna Go Where The People Go'. The pieces comfortably fell into place. The band were on good form and this scattershot-but-genial song was born. Having no fear of experimentation by then, I could bring anything to the band and they'd nail it. We were all big fans of The Damned and adored their fearless approach to making records. We'd use them as a punk blueprint for allowing humour into our songs.

A fun song to play with the solo band and a crowd favourite, 'The Wildhearts never quite nailed this one live. Presumably because we couldn't remember recording it.

## GIVE THE GIRL A GUN

Recorded during the Comforts Place 'PHUQ' sessions and mixed much later at Battery Studios in London. This one completed the mixed bag of oddities that would accompany 'I Wanna Go Where The People Go'.

Having been brought up in a very violent household - my mother was regularly abused by her drunken second husband - I was pre-disposed to reject any form of misogyny or abuse of females. The song was actually prompted by a survey conducted at the time which concluded a male child brought up in an environment of domestic violence would be prone to abuse women in adult life. Those kind of baseless theories always drive me fucking insane but this was personal and I tried to channel the anger into a 1950s style pop vehicle. It's a style of music in which I've always found comfort.

The bagpipes were a fluke afterthought - after drunkenly finding "a piper for all occasions" advertised in a local paper. Just the idea of being in a room with this torturous contraption at full volume sounded hilarious. And it was - torturous and hilarious. We were in hysterics as the piper tunelessly honked away in the live room, blissfully unaware that a stand-up comic couldn't have provided more laughs.

I'm very fond of this song. One of those that probably would never have been conceived had we not needed a B-side. In fact those are some of my favourite songs in my collection.

## MINDSLIDE

Written as part of the 'Just In Lust' collection, these would turn out to be the strongest trio - in my opinion - of B-sides that we would record.

Feeling slightly exposed as a three-piece, we started listening to suggestions from people in the business. The name repeatedly mentioned was Mark Keds. I was a big fan of his previous band The Senseless Things and could plainly see a correlation between the two groups. Hanging out - as was our style of audition - showed Mark to also be a mutual lover of all things debauched. The signs seemed 100% positive. He also had a tremendous voice. Now all he needed to do was be a great guitar player.

Once we plugged in and started playing it was obvious that Mark wasn't going to be able to play 70% of our material. Putting set lists together of the less tricky songs would be a frustrating and pointless task, even if we'd have accepted the challenge. But fortune came out with the sun when it came to Mark's live debut with us at 1995's Phoenix Festival. He apparently went AWOL on tour in Japan, forcing us to cancel our appearance. Danny and Ritch feigned indignity in the press but, being honest, I was hugely relieved. We'd have sounded horrible. I was also really happy that he'd saved me the job of firing another person from the band. The best move was made and to this day I thank Mark for making it for us.

Still, it has to be said that he was great fun to hang out with. He brought fantastic arrangement ideas and that amazing voice to the session. It sat with our bombast like tequila and grapefruit - the band drink at the time - incidentally

introduced by Mark. In fact it was this cocktail that was the main reason for us leaving the AC/DC tour!

I love this song. The band were on murderous form as a three-piece. I wonder what would have happened if we'd stayed that way or if someone within the organisation had simply noticed the cohesion and suggested it? In a worst case scenario we'd have broken up - which we were about to do anyway.

By the way: a 'Mindslide' is a term I made up for an inopportune switch of moods, usually made in public.

#### **FRIEND FOR FIVE MINUTES**

Another favourite B-side of mine, brilliantly realised by Simon Efemey, (Simon was the very producer who shat in a pitta bread for the proposed cover photo of 'Greetings From Shitsville' - predictably declined by the powers that be.) 'Friend For Five Minutes' boasts a stunning performance nailed to perfection by the band, especially Ritch.

The theme of the song surrounds snorting cocaine and getting intimate with strangers in toilet cubicles - a sordid and regular activity at the time. Of the countless hours' worth of sordid activity held in these tightly-knit spaces, I barely remember what went on - or with whom it went on with. But if I said it wasn't fun I'd be lying.

I was still snorting it back then but was already getting bored with the stuff, and looking for something that would do the job faster and harder. The real trouble would begin when I took to the pipe again, some years after trying it in Seattle. And I wouldn't get bored of that for a very long time.

At this point I felt like I was entering a new stage of confidence as a writer. The arrangements and style seemed more comfortable and still sound more mature than earlier efforts.

#### **UNDERKILL**

Recorded as part of the Mark Keds session, this song sat in limbo for a while, awaiting clearance from the Sex Pistols estate due to a brief sample of "EMI" ("we only did it 'cos of fame"). A true and frankly ridiculous story.

Never being one to ask for permission to do anything - favouring the "apologise later" theory - I began, on our lawyer's advice, to listen carefully to more experienced people in the business. An approach, it was guaranteed, that would improve our fortunes. It didn't. It merely brought things to light. Microscopic issues that would have gone legally unnoticed for the rest of time.

Anyway, after months of legal ping-pong for this tiny bit of music, the sample had been cleared by every Sex Pistol alive and everyone else involved in the actual recording. The only person who had a problem - and duly stomped on the agreement - was Sid Vicious' mum. Why the fuck a trouble-making parent of a dead junkie was even involved in the matter irritated the fuck out of me. I've always thought the fascination behind dead heroin addicts like Vicious and Thunders had as much to

do with music as whatever dress the fucking Spice Girls were wearing. In a song about never backing down, this highly ironic exclamation point made us look like the puppets we were. Dangling from the strings of corporate politics, I'd invited the game to convince me of its merits and had successfully found myself baulking from the smell of pig shit emanating from every pus-leaking pore of this filthy industry.

We re-recorded the ending of the Pistols song instead - fuck 'em. It was much as a piss-take as a statement, throwing in my own little barb at all industry monkeys and money-hungry cunts with absolutely no interest in what party it was that they were shitting on. Punk rock, eh?

Truth is, a couple of years earlier, we'd re-recorded a Beatles section in a song on our debut album. Either the label hadn't listened or couldn't be arsed to go to battle with Michael Jackson's empire. Whatever the reason, we didn't ask for clearance of any kind and no-one even noticed.

### S.I.N. (In Sin)

A song about bravado - something I spent far too little time enjoying. While I was happy to front anything or anyone, I barely enjoyed confidence, but I suspected that I wanted to feel more of it. I just didn't know how to sustain it guilt-free. An inner voice would bark at me, "how dare you? You jumped-up little cunt." And I'd back down. I'd stand up to any man, but I was no match for myself.

Again, another short punk blast, this time doubling rhythms with every section, then dropping back and starting again. It was an idea I stole from Pantera's 'Rise', although I wanted to give it a Nirvana edge - like on 'Molly's Lips'.

I was always keen to remove the "metal" tag that we'd ended up with but that fucker was nailed on and still I never quite managed to remove it. I loved Pantera but most heavy metal left me cold - we'd regularly get compared to bands I couldn't stand. Never even a mention of bands I considered I owed publishing money to, like Hüsker Dü, Stiff Little Fingers, The Damned and The Replacements. Just as well, really.

'S.I.N.' is a great song to pull out of the bag in a live situation as it benefits from not being rehearsed. I still don't know the lyrics to this one, and enjoy making up words to suit the occasion. Or just making up sounds that resemble words.

### SICK OF DRUGS

Written in the same weekend as 'Red Light-Green Light' in a desperate bid to pen a "single" for our baying record label. This was prior to the 'Fishing For Luckies' debacle - an album which would ultimately feature this song amongst its hastily cobbled-together contents.

The plan was to release the song on April 1st, regardless of what day of the week that fell on. The CD packaging came complete with a DRY grass mat (or sod, if you like, simply the initials of Sick Of Drugs) to slain home the joke.

Too much humour for a rock band? Probably. We were supposed to be a po-faced

metal group, right? Anyway, in a massive misinterpretation of the punchline, the label released it on April 5th. Perhaps they were intentionally having the last laugh? I think I like that story better.

We obviously weren't sick of drugs, or anything that could alter the reality of our faltering career. We were a vastly misunderstood band slowly drowning in a Britpop-obsessed industry that saw us as akin to a metal mosquito in the milk. We were simply pests.

The song at least threw us back into people's living rooms for a brief period and began another spurt of activity, alarming the dormant label execs that the game was on again. Again! Soon they'd want another album and would stop at nothing to get it. Even if it meant buying back some catalogue they'd already given to us. Songs that were too long for a double album that I wanted to make. Songs they supposedly didn't like - at least not until the reviews informed them that they were great songs. Things were about to get very confusing, irritating and futile.

*Side note: at the band's request I changed the line "... with your mind made up like a ferris wheel" to "...with your mind made up like a will of steel", a 'ferris wheel' was deemed too American-sounding. To this day I detest the altered line. I don't understand why I did it and now sing "Ferris wheel" when performing the track live.*

#### RED LIGHT-GREEN LIGHT

As mentioned, this was penned back-to-back with 'Sick Of Drugs' as a possible single. Eventually both songs would be used as singles. I'd boil in my own hatred that our label couldn't afford to put us on tour in Europe and the US, but would spend tens of thousands on a dumb promo video that would be shown on TV two or three times. So I decided to make a video that would never be shown on TV. And I intended to make it for £1 sterling. We'd invest in two lightbulbs (50p each) one green, one red, and flick between them. A sly dig at the industry, inspired by the Pixies and The Replacements. Ironically the video was shown on TV more times than 'Just In Lust' - which cost about £60,000.

#### BAD TIME TO BE HAVING A BAD TIME

I loved the way this song turned out and wish we'd branched out in styles like this more often. As it stood, recording a country song was considered a brave move.

I was beginning to write better B-sides than album tracks, and this current batch of B-sides would result in some of my favourite compositions of our 90s catalogue. In fact I'd often suggest releasing an album of B-sides - an idea that was met with typical indifference every time.

I'd struggle with the logic surrounding most of East/West's decisions. But recording six songs for two singles that would be released before an album was even written? That was just irresponsible. Especially when the material was this strong. Why not just release all of the B-sides as an album? When I was a kid, if bands released singles at all they'd be releases from an album, not prior to an album. And especially not released before an album was even written - with B sides that could

very well be better than the album tracks to follow. It struck me as pointless activity designed to waste time and opportunity. Still, providing the booze and drugs didn't run out, I kept on writing. And they never ran out.

'Bad Time To Be Having A Bad Time' was originally intended as a B-side to 'In Lilly's Garden', a single that was rumoured but never materialised. It was written about the break-up with my then-girlfriend. Always was, and still is one of my favourite Wildhearts songs.

### SKY CHASER HIGH

My entire record collection influenced the writing of this song so I opted out of taking a direct writing credit. Instead I chose to go down the Trad Arr (traditional arrangement) route instead. Back when I was a kid, I wasn't sure what trad arr meant, but it looked clandestine and cool and I was intrigued when bands used it on record labels. Surprising, then, that Green Day would come up with a song so similar in 'Brutal Love' (go check it out, man that is close). I can only suspect Billie Joe has the same Journey, Otis Redding and Good Rats albums in his collection as I did. Or he simply heard my song. I just wish I'd taken credit for writing it now.

It's a silly song about getting wasted, a fairly popular topic for me in 1996, that really worked my love for 1960s rock 'n' roll mixed with our stripped-down approach. It still gets requested at acoustic shows, I still don't know the words and still no-one seems to mind.

It's another song that has lasted the test of time way beyond anything I expected.

### GOT IT ON TUESDAY

My first session with Ralph Jezzard as producer. He was a man who would completely understand what I wanted from a song so well that I would later work with him on 'Endless Nameless' and then 'Valor Del Corazon', but ultimately fall out with on a catastrophic level. More on that later in the book.

Once again capturing the sound in my head with effortless efficiency, the final mix leaps from the turntable and demands your attention. Never a big fan favourite, but rather typically it's one of my proudest moments as a writer. Tradition dictates that my favourite songs are unlikely to be anyone else's and this is a prime example.

Written while walking around Camden – intensely buzzing on speed – I'm still not entirely sure what "Got It On Tuesday" actually means. I used to say it was in reference to receiving my unemployment benefit giro a day late. But if memory serves me correct, I think Thursday was giro day. Anyway, it was a great title, and a killer song wrapped around a loose theme of getting the point of something a little too late.

More to the point, I wanted to show the world that our oddball punk, metal, pop band could also swing. Really swing. Being a huge Stones and Aerosmith fan, I wanted to put that swagger somewhere into our repertoire. In my opinion, this song showcased that better than anything else we ever recorded.

On this evidence, I will also say that we were at our very best at this point. I don't expect that opinion to be shared by anyone. There was always something I liked us to capture – where most of the fans would have been happy with more fast, heavy songs. I'm not complaining, I'm just saying that you and I probably like The Wildhearts for different reasons. And that's okay.

## DO ANYTHING

Quite possibly my favourite song we ever recorded – or at least my favourite sounding recording. Again it showed Ralph Jezzard was the producer who came closer to capturing our essence than any other we've ever worked with. I hope that one day we can become friends again although something tells me this won't happen.

This was a magic session that glued us as a group with such adhesion that we forgot to notice everything falling apart around us. A thoughtful label and experienced management would have encouraged us to follow this muse and get us writing a new album with these songs leading the way with Ralph producing. Instead this would be the final truly harmonious recording session in which we'd be involved together before our split.

I can't fully explain why I love this track so much. Maybe it reminds me of a time when the music was more important to us than the lifestyle? Or maybe both were equal? I dunno. How do you explain natural magic?

Either way, it was a time when the gods ruled the music industry. Bands were bigger than the game and the fans still worshipped the makers of music with true awe. A very healthy relationship, however self-gratifying it may sound. I've no problem at all with the final wall between performer and audience being removed – I've done my bit to remove some of the bricks myself – but I also loved being bewitched by music and musicians, once upon a time. I'm thankful I was born early enough to experience this in my life.

I suspect I'm also fond of this song because this is my final fond memory of The Wildhearts at our peak. It's hard to fully convey how utterly wretched things would become from here. For me it feels like a photo of a dead relative, and this is last time it was truly great. We were truly great.

Nostalgia aside, it reminds me of a band that had everything to offer and were cruelly ignored. The subsequent downward trajectory was a direct result of not being nurtured at this crucial point. Who knows – maybe if someone had actually really cared, they would have just said "take a fucking holiday!"

## THE BRITISH ALL-AMERICAN HOMEBBOY CROWD

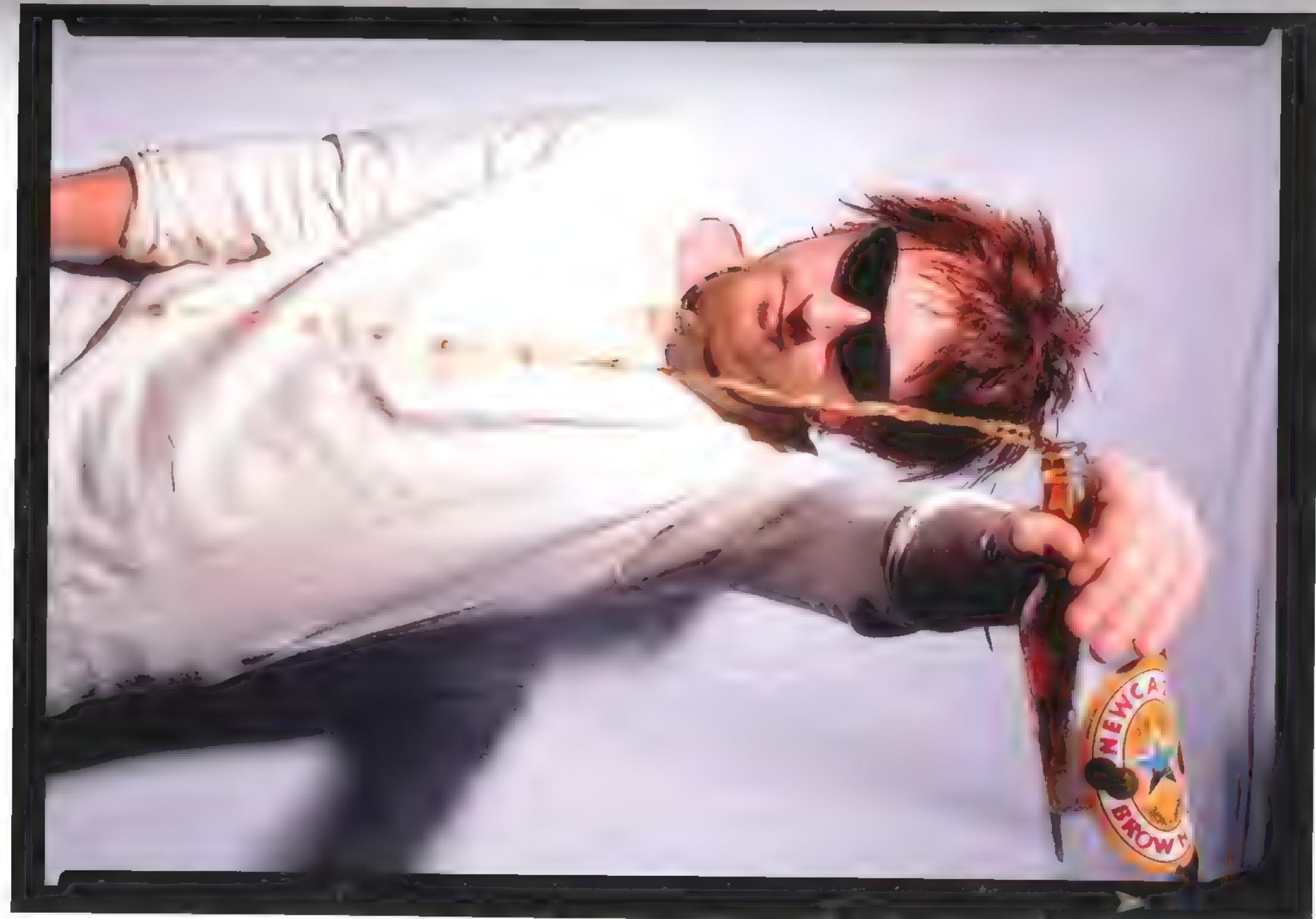
A misguided and misinformed stab at how the burgeoning rap movement music in UK – a miserable parody of its more formidable US counterpart – was seeping into all walks of London culture. My beloved rock/punk scene had never been further away. Dirty and wasted troubadours armed with loud rock 'n' roll guitars were disappearing. Their cool factor forcibly removed from the scene as if by wire wool and fresh paint.



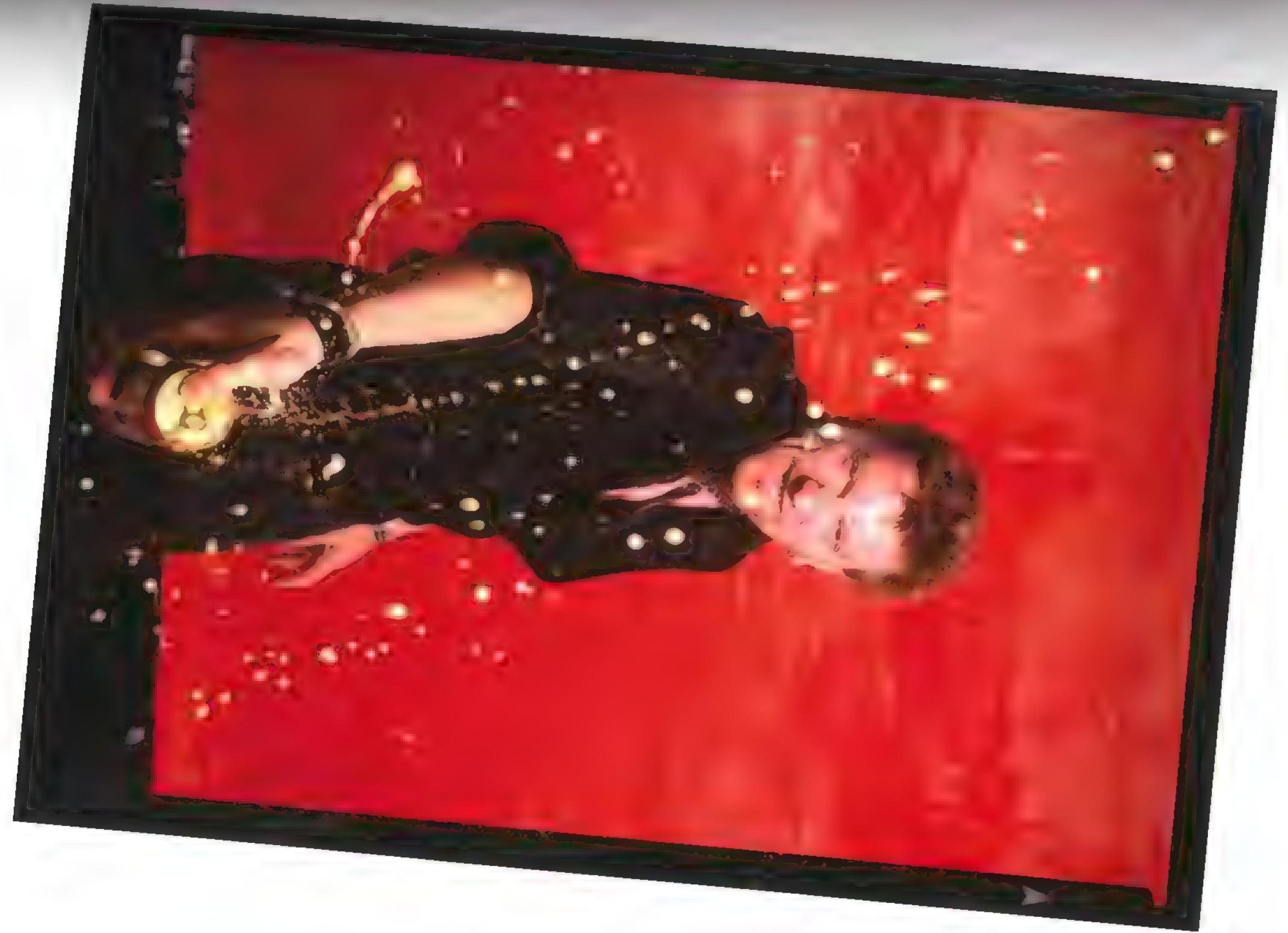
Not just the end of an era, it was the end of my era. If we were going to make it through this sea change in style it would be by stubborn refusal to leave, rather than any cordial invite to stay. Yesterday was out of style and the present smelled of detergent and plastic to me. I could see right through it. I knew it had the shelf life of dairy produce. And I was having none of it. I wanted pissed-off guitars, so much so that I'd clutch my yesterday in my arms and challenge anyone to pry it away. I fucking dare you.

Thing is, I'd always loved change. I still value change as an essential movement from which vitality is born, but not at the death of something better. And just because a clueless majority rigged the vote? Or worse still, won on an apathetic weight advantage. Nothing is better than loud guitars. Nothing. It is fact. It is science. No matter what generation you are, if you were born after the invention of the Marshall amp, then you agree.

But stylistically speaking it felt as if our time was up. And to an extent it was. It was certainly over creatively because I could feel the departure of our peak. Typically, in what would become a very common Wildhearts U-turn, victory was about to be rammed back into the freshly-plundered jaws of defeat.







CHAPTER THREE:  
FISHING FOR LUCKIES

Where I will  
consider breaking  
up the band,  
go to Japan  
for the first time,  
tour with AC/DC  
and leave  
East/West.



## INGLORIOUS

'Fishing' For Luckies' means nothing more than the fanclub-only release to me now. I didn't pay much attention to the East/West re-release, a desperate looking cash-in with a couple of extra tracks thrown in called 'Fishing For More Luckies'. And even less than the 'official' release (called 'Fishing For Luckies') that apparently featured the singles 'Sick Of Drugs' and 'Red Light-Green Light'. Which began with 'Inglorious', the song which I'd intended as the opener for 'PHUQ'. Confused? You should have been there. Honestly, it was a fucking hoot.

Tucked away in a country farmhouse just outside of Wales, we began chipping away at the 20-odd songs pencilled in for the mighty double album I'd slated as the follow-up to our debut. Not knowing how dramatic this two session recording marathon would become (which included losing CJ in the process), spirits were high. 'Inglorious' was largely the reason. We knew that our almighty second album had a barnstormer of an introduction in this song. A very good start.

The indie world around us whined about the pressures of being in a band while we morphed into a bloated exaggeration of rock 'n' roll excess. And we loved every cliché-ridden second of it. But as high as our substance consumption rate may have been, we maintained a strict work ethic. It was this principle that saw this mother lode of new tunes fiercely whipped into a tight batch of material. It was this attitude that permeated every note of 'Inglorious.'

I wanted the main riff - a nod to classic 70s hard rock - to morph into a chorus with the ambition of 'Velouria' by Pixies, or 'Victoria' by The Kinks, by way of a Cardiacs arrangement using Metallica guitars. 'Master Of Puppets'-era, naturally, they completely lost me on the entirely predictable 'Black' album. With this song kicking off a majestic double album, I felt free to explore my favourite musical styles and make a punk rock version of 'Queen II'. Ambitious? You bet your Chuck Taylor's it was. And I didn't want it any other way.

To this day, 'Inglorious' is still a furiously difficult song to play live, given the 'head-tap-belly-rub' nature of the conflicting rhythms in the verse. Plus the fact that there are no fucking gaps in the vocal parts. Smart move, Ginger. Okay, so I was making life difficult for myself. But nothing - and I repeat, nothing - compared to how difficult things were about to get with no further assistance required. Yes, this is where things got very confusing indeed. So forgive me if I lapse into frustrated ranting whilst re-living this hellish period.







## SCHIZOPHONIC

In the way that 'Inglorious' would be side one's gruelling rock epic, 'Schizophonic' would be side two's rock workout (please remember that PHUQ was written as a double disc, four-sided album). 'Schizophonic' channelled my suspicions that my intentions - other than the music itself - were out of step with what the media were championing and what the label expected. But I'd always had a deep admiration for musicians who bucked trends by furiously ploughing out fresh paths. I believed I was carrying on that same valiant tradition. Simply going against the grain wasn't part of my plan at all. I just saw things from a different perspective than the business or the charts. This is from where my reputation as 'being difficult to work with' emerged.

The situation with East/West was becoming cartoonish. I'd want a black and white video, they'd want colour. I'd want a heavy single, they'd want a ballad. I'd write a double album, they'd cut it up and release it as a disjointed single album with all the flow of a clogged latrine. Pre-empting that struggle, the song states: "If there's a sound you play that doesn't fit today, why not just play the bastard anyway?"

Now, 20-odd years later, I'm convinced that I only have a loyal and devoted fanbase because I firmly stuck to my guns at the time - at least until a giant corporate hand prised the plans from my fingers. As a result, The Wildhearts don't sound like a derivative and curious artefact, like a dated snippet of radio circa 1995.

As a musician, your legacy is often only as strong as your reserve. I knew little about the inner workings of the corporate machine but I figured that if it sounded like bullshit and smelled like bullshit, then it was bullshit. Who knows what could have happened if I'd just agreed to bend over a little? Taken just the tip of that seemingly irresistible corporate cock? Accepted the creative rape that musicians were queuing up to have administered? Maybe then I'd have got that big cheque that never came? I didn't give a fuck. I had little doubt that I could spend money easier than I could live with the dishonour.

## SOUL SEARCHING ON THE PLANET EARTH (*Different Kind Of Love*)

A track that was thrown together to pad out the newest (third) version of 'Fishing For Luckies'. At this point - about a year after writing 'PHUQ' - I'd had most of the fight knocked out of me. I'd taken the advice of experts and made possibly the biggest mistake I would ever make. And believe me, in a handsomely comprehensive rapsheet of mistakes like mine, that's some feat.

Now a fully-formed alcoholic, I was led from recording session to recording session, with little more than a bottle dangling from a stick. Often with the songs still percolating in my head. I'd show the songs to the band and within a few hours, we had laid them to tape forever.

I don't even remember where we were when this song was recorded; I'd already started heavily drinking away the weight of regret. At least that part of the plan was working. I mean, why spread the material of a writer as prolific as myself so thinly across so many hastily-released versions of an album ('Fishing For Luckies'), that was largely comprised of songs from a perfectly good double album plan ('PHUQ') in the first place? The whole thing seemed so utterly ridiculous. I was helpless to move

in any direction so I hit the bottle to hide the shame. The end seemed inevitable. If we simply split up, surely East/West would lose their grip on my music?

Japan was a place we'd never visited before. With guitarist Jef Streatfield replacing CJ, they accepted us like conquering heroes on our first visit. It was, quite frankly, the last thing I ever expected to happen. We experienced a Beatlemania-like reception. That kind of appreciation – which we'd been denied for years – breathed a zest into us that had long since departed. We felt important again. We felt loved. Soon we would stay together as a band just to come back to Japan and feel that love one more time.

But our new found confidence would influence a turn of unexpected events that we were ill-prepared to handle. Firstly, East/West finally agreed to release us from their contract. That meant we were free to look for a more suitable label to fund my own imprint, Round Records. Suddenly a European AC/DC tour was delivered to our door – surely the highlight of any band's career?

Sadly, without a label we were largely broke, but with just enough funds to finance the European leg of the tour. Then the cruel irony of fate offered us a chance to also support AC/DC on their US tour. Finally our chance to break America. I invested almost everything I had in the bank on the promise that by the time we reached LA, we'd have a new financial set-up handed to us on a plate. However, the promise of a brand new deal turned out to be merely another fantasy. We never made it anywhere near the Los Angeles section of the US tour – we merely watched our funds dry up, then we drank away the reality of our financial situation.

After completing the hefty three-month European trek, less than a week into our US stint, the now constantly squabbling band were instructed by our management to return home.

#### **DO THE CHANNEL BOP**

Designed to be the big rock assault course of side three (of 'PHUQ'), 'Do The Channel Bop' was intentionally monstrous. Written about the sport of openly ignoring dull people – something I used to excel in – it was just one of the many humiliating methods I would employ to stave off boredom. I can plainly see how horrible a bastard I was back in 1994. Alienation doesn't leave much room for humility to breathe.

Since recently becoming something of a 'hot new band' after the success of 'Earth vs The Wildhearts', our dressing rooms began filling up with rent-a-mate types everywhere we played. People wanted to be seen with us. Perhaps in fear of missing out on something? I don't know. I've never known. The concept of wanting to loiter in people's personal space was something to which I was never drawn – even as a starstruck kid. And there certainly wasn't anything exotic going on in our dressing room. Unless you consider the sight of four guys bent over a table sniffing lines of white powder thrilling.

But one thing to which I was attracted was forcibly removing these parasitic wankers from our private area with a barrage of Fuck Offs and even the occasional boot to assist their dismissal. I could never suffer fools at the best of times. And as for fools who wanted to simply get drunk for free, I took great pleasure in making them

feel as intensely uncomfortable as possible before relieving them with humiliation and eviction. I hated small talk. I saw the backstage area as a place of privacy for the people working. No-one was going to get a free ride from The Wildhearts – not unless they were invited. Backstage was and still is – a place for band and crew. I still dislike having a dressing room full of people. Even if it's full of people I know and like. These days I'll just suggest an after-hours watering hole in which to gather. I guess age has some merits after all.

I still like the arrangement of this song; it shows a mixture of innocence and brooding confidence. It's the result of a wide-eyed fascination for blending rhythms, tempos and styles. It was a time of experimentation and I still look for this thrill when writing today. It only comes when trying something new. Regardless of whether it works or is popular, I'll always try something new in favour of pandering to the allure of past glories. However much people plead for a carbon copy of the first Wildhearts album.

### **MOODSWINGS AND BOUNDABOUTS**

With Jef fully ensconced in the band, the recording of the extra 'Fishing For Luckies' songs acted as a showcase – at least – for his guitar playing and equally impressive singing skills. Using a trick on which I'd come to rely, I quickly pieced together a fast song. For some reason, many people prefer that I write a fast song than something slower, measured, thought out and generally better composed (in my mind).

I'd seen it work with 'Suckerpunch' and 'Caffeine Bomb' and I still use this approach when I can't think of something requiring a cerebral approach to the lyrics. Don't get me wrong: there's nothing wrong about fast songs with dumb lyrics – personally I love them. But I do admit they're a damned sight easier to write than trying to plant a phrase or theme into people's heads. Having said that, there are people who consider 'Suckerpunch' to be poetry. (So, in effect, I'm talking bollocks. One man's shit is another man's toothpaste, and all that.) If you've got a band who play fast songs competently, it employs the same level of skill as driving a very fast car down a very straight road.

It's a fun song to play live as learning the words is essentially pointless. I'm not sure there was even a lyric sheet when we recorded it. I do like hearing Jef shout "sort it out". I often got the impression Jef didn't enjoy being in the band. Or that he'd simply joined just too late to see us fully enjoying it. But this song definitely captures a sense of joy – albeit within a very intense situation.

### **IN LIKE FLYNN**

Written as another piece of fluff to pad out the third 'Fishing For Luckies' release. 'In Like Flynn' looked back at the success of the fanclub-only release of the mini-album. The irony being that it only came about because our label didn't like the songs in the first place. Of course, after amazingly positive reviews of the original mini-album started clogging up album sections of rock magazines, East/West began to take notice of the tracks. Those detestably long songs they'd given us in a bid to get us out of their office. Now they wanted the songs back, and in a comedy-gold u-turn of attitude, demanded the rights back to the material they'd allowed us to license from them. Fucking jokers.

I was sold the deal based on the premise that in fulfilling our album quota, we'd be closer to leaving the label. That was enough for me to back the project. They could release as many different versions of the album as they wanted, just as long as they let us out of our contract. I wanted to get off this label so badly I'd arranged to visit a sports shop in Kensington to purchase a baseball bat with which to smash up our A&R man's Kiss pinball machine. As options go, a re-release of 'Fishing For Luckies' seemed preferable to a spell in jail for criminal damage.

As a side note, Universal - who bought out Warners after they took over operations from East/West - still own the rights to all of my recorded material from the 90s. This is why shoddy looking re-releases show up from time to time bearing the band's name. These records are released with no approval nor financial gain to myself. Copyright ownership is a form of music slavery that I happily signed up for. Accepting that I will never own my own music is just a tragic part of the deal. But when a wide-eyed young wannabe kid signs a 38-page contract, the last thing he's going to do is actually read the damned thing. No one read those ridiculous things; they just signed up for stardom. In fact I greatly doubt that anyone who did read a record contract ever went on to write a decent fucking song. When I was a kid, landing a deal was the holy grail - the mark that you'd finally arrived. Even a clause that claimed exploitation rights on "Earth or any other as yet undiscovered planets" wasn't going to put me off signing one. (This clause, by the way, was an actual stipulation in a standard recording contract in the 90s.)

We may have finally been contractually free as a band, but we were now a band stripped of all we believed great about rock 'n' roll. By this point we were basically toast. Enter the dark days.

#### SKY BABIES

I've always been fascinated with the paranormal but I didn't really focus on UFOs until around 1988. At the time I began getting flashbacks of a huge ship, looking not entirely unlike Thunderbird 2 (the big green one) hovering above me and my chums all aged around five. Previously repressed memories would start increasing in intensity until becoming a genuine distraction.

Once the event was verified by my mother (that at least something "odd" did happen to cause her little boy to freak the fuck out that day), I decided to go back to the spot. It looked nothing like I'd remembered. Not until I got on my knees anyway, and with the vantage point of a five-year-old, the screened memories came flooding back. Something huge hovering above us, almost touching the telegraph wires. Suddenly finding myself alone on a playing field, now in the dark. Running to a friend's house who was shrieking inside as his mother slammed the door in my face. All disturbing stuff, I'm sure you will agree.

As soon as I returned to London, I contacted a hypnotherapist. While successfully putting me under hypnosis, they were unable to locate this particular event. Instead, under hypnosis, I was taken to an earlier event. As a three or four-year-old kid, I used to leave my physical body and fly around the house. This was a regular occurrence for me and I was blissfully oblivious to how uncommon it might be for others. I can still feel the carpet touching my chest as I'd float down the stairs and

under the old record player/cabinet. I realised that we had a huge mirror above the fireplace. Having always been the curious type, I figured I should fly up and take a look at what my disembodied form looked like.

What I saw was an intensely burning human shape. Or at least the head and shoulders: bright white and with kind, but slightly different features than mine. Familiar but different. It looked like me as an old man.

As soon as this image came to me, I was brought out of hypnosis. The faint image of a large, dark green object the size of a football field floated away from the playing field on which the UFO sighting took place. I was back in the room.

I'm still not any closer to understanding what it all means. While I'm absolutely convinced that some actual event took place on this playing field as a five-year-old – complete with implanted screen memories in place of trauma – I'm even more confused as to the nature of anything extra-terrestrial. I do, however, believe that there is something going on, and it is vastly different in origin and intention than anything we could imagine.

'Sky Babes' is an eager if uninformed take on my relationship with the subject in matter. It was also a way of getting rid of a ton of bits 'n' pieces I had lying around in my head.

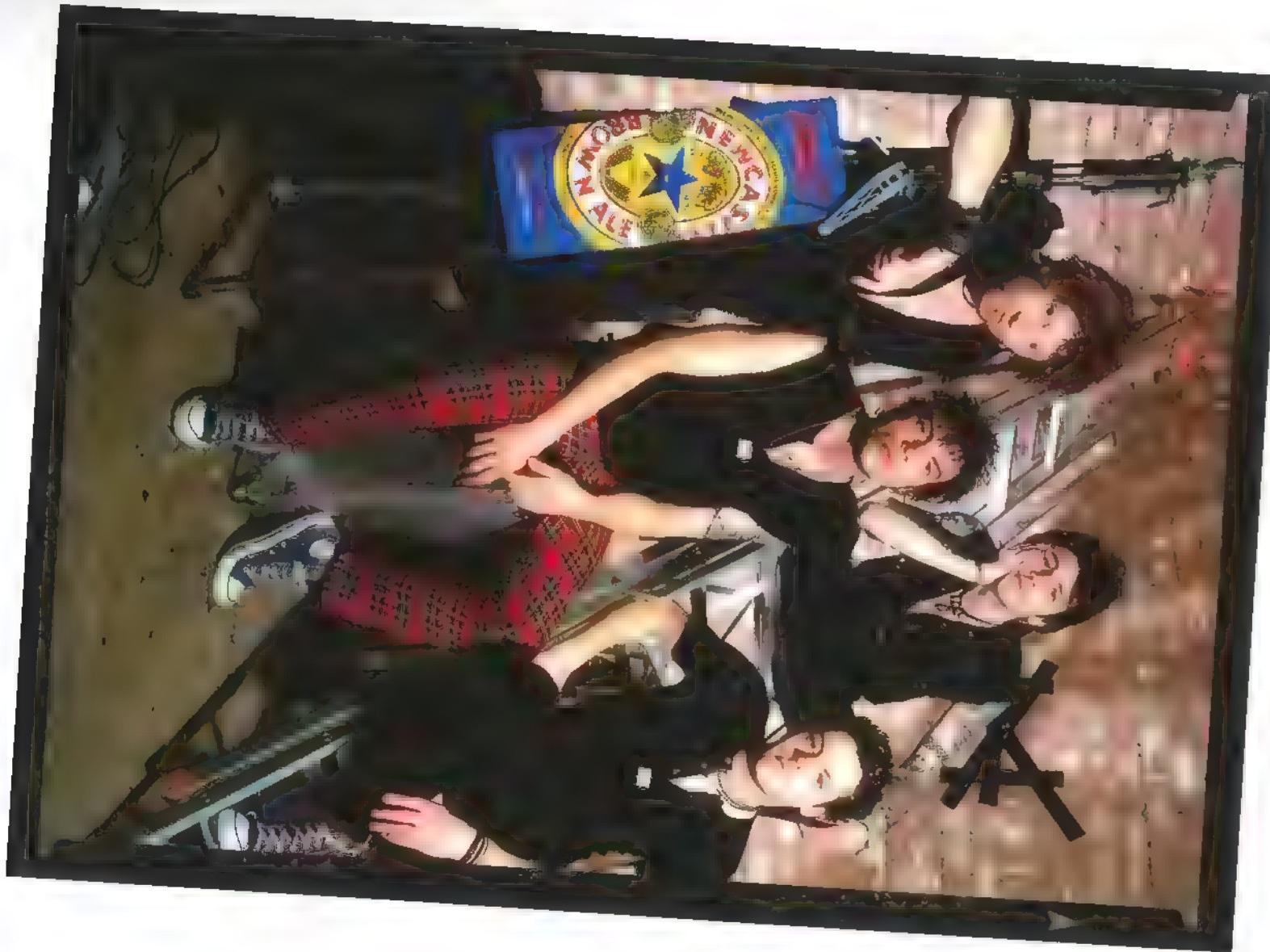
Side note: did you know that the term 'flying saucer' was coined by pilot Kenneth Arnold to describe the way an unidentified object moved, and nothing to do with the way it looked?

#### **WRITING SONGS**

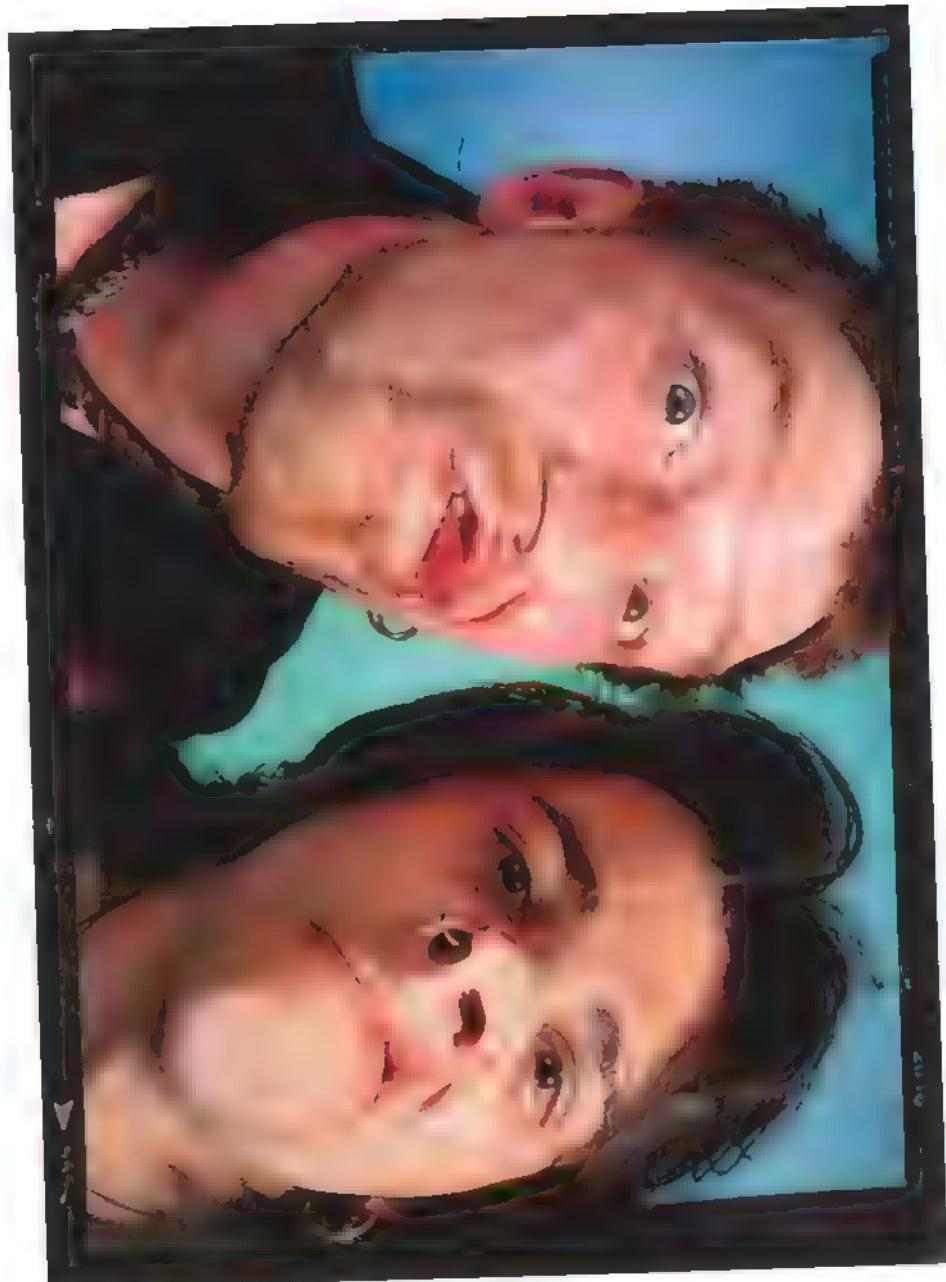
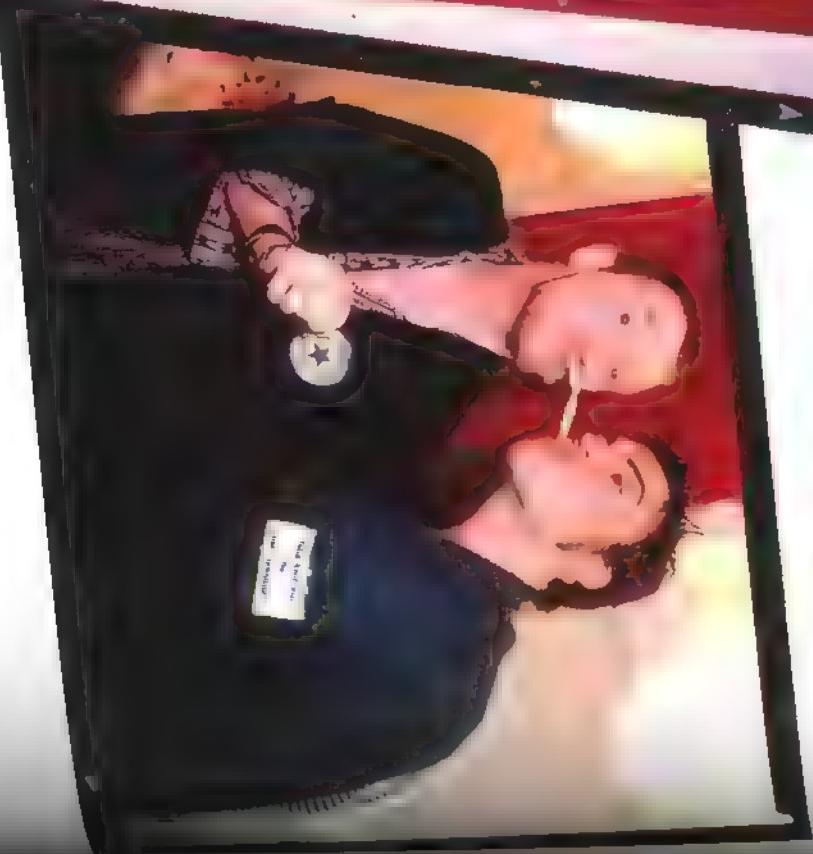
Another one that dates to happier times back in the "Shitsville" flat – sitting with a guitar on my lap and a head full of booze and drugs. About to be inducted into the greatest lifestyle in the world, I was still fascinated by this gift of songwriting. No matter how famous we ended up, no matter how inflated the bank account, my songs were the number one priority. I would make this pact with myself on a daily basis. The songs themselves were the reason I'd been signed, they were the most valuable part of this puzzle, and as long as I stuck to my promise of honesty and integrity, everything else would work out. I still maintain the promise. And I still make a living writing songs.

Naïve? Obviously. I could never have imagined how far from the dream this story was going to veer. Never would I have imagined that we'd be on tour with AC/DC, but leave in shame before the run ended. But there we were: deflated and defeated. From humble beginnings as music fans ourselves, we now had a band that featured a heroin addict and a bunch of drugged-up drunks. Our career had been derailed at every turn until we'd become a band without a label and without any money.

All considerations of a bright future were shot to pieces and we were forced to play gigs for hand to mouth money. One of the shows that paid well was the London Astoria (now sadly demolished). We figured we'd do this for a while then do the decent thing and break up.



However, it transpired that a fan – and a friend of Jef – was working at a label that had recently merged with an Australian company to become Mushroom Records. He'd brought his boss along to see us at what was to be our final Astoria show. The boss enjoyed the band so much, he wanted to offer us a deal. Following a meeting with the head honcho, he mentioned that he liked our noisier side more than our melodic side. He asked if I would consider aiming in that direction. I told him that was exactly what I intended to do with the next album. Although I'm not sure if he suspected at the time just how noisy it was about to get...



CHAPTER THREE B:  
FISHING FOR LUCKIES  
THE B-SIDES

## GEORDIE IN WONDERLAND

The song that was famously turned down by Kevin Keegan - when submitted for inclusion in Newcastle United's pre-game playlist - on the grounds that they didn't need a song about a bloke called "George" in Wonderland.

Born and bred in the north east, folk music was ingrained into the social fabric as much as the smell of hops and the sound of laughter. I've always loved it. This would be my first attempt writing in more of a folk style. It was story-telling and singing in my native accent - two things I wish I'd done from the start.

Where I come from in South Shields, people always sang rock music in a 'rock' accent. There was little or no commercial concern behind it; musicians from my neck of the woods were not expecting to be picked up by BBC radio anytime soon. Still, from working men's drinking dens to beer-stink infused nightclubs - from the Tees Valley to Berwick-Upon-Tweed - you wouldn't hear anyone singing in a Geordie accent. Unless they were singing traditional folk songs like 'Cushie Butterfield' or 'The Lambton Worm'.

With a deep sense of belonging, I loved these tales that refused to let go of my regional history. I wasn't even aware of how complex the melodies were until I started writing my own songs much later. 'Geordie In Wonderland' was penned around 1990. I had returned from tour and found that the people left in charge of looking after my Russian dwarf hamsters hadn't fed them for weeks, forcing one to eat half of the other. The song still reminds me of this heart-breaking discovery and the sense of absolute helplessness that I'd never experienced until that point.

The mandolin solo in the middle was simply an electric guitar tuned up really high. The real mandolins we used sounded like the last-gasp squawks from the beak of a dying chicken.

It was an unexpected audience favourite, which amazed me. I'm sure it would never have surfaced in the set otherwise. Being in full-on sabotage mode as I was at this point, the only reason we played this song on *Top Of The Pops* was because I refused to play the A-side, 'If Life Is Like A Lovebank I Want An Overdraft'. That forced the BBC to come up with a brand new stage set about a week before airing. The reason for the refusal? I'm pretty sure there wasn't one.

## IF LIFE IS LIKE A LOVEBANK I WANT AN OVERDRAFT

Given the balls-out nature of the other material intended for album two, I thought it would be hilarious to feature a disco beat over a Germanic industrial riff. Complete with a dead-pan vocal that was more like a repetitive drone than our typically melodic or shouty fare. Again, the intention was to give the intended double album some variety.

Allow me to reiterate that these songs were written as departures within a lengthy double album of rock bombast and bravado. East/West's meddling with my intended design was the point of no return for me. Every attempt to jeopardise label marketing plans were employed. Generic video ideas were sabotaged. Compromises were met with as much hostility as I could muster. Often with the desired results.

So when E/W pitched this song as a single, they granted me full control of the video budget. No sooner had I the cheque in my hands than I began putting a team together to make a pornography movie with my good friend Philip Richardson – a director of many of our videos and the guy responsible for freeing me from a Thai jail some years later.

The resulting video featured love beads pulled out of arses, chocolate bars rammed into vaginas, cheese graters rubbed against scrotums and copious wanking (a scene that actually set the director's bedroom on fire). The video played like a *Tiswas* production of *Caligula*. It was hilarious.

At the grand unveiling, our movie was played to the head of East/West's video department – a lovely girl who was admittedly only doing her job. What she witnessed literally reduced her to tears. It was a mean and cheap but deeply satisfying trick. But I will always love this song because of this notorious video and the reaction it acquired.

It's a tricky track to play live: just a few BPMs too fast and the groove is lost. I'm convinced that only Ritch Battersby can play this song at the correct tempo.

Ritch and I also had an amazing idea for the video. We planned to caption it along the foot of the screen with karaoke-style lyrics, complete with bouncing ball. But instead of the real songwords, we'd use genuinely side-splitting misheard lyrics. The idea was brilliant, funny and typically unusual for the time. Not surprisingly, our request was met with unsympathetic dismissal – presumably on the grounds that we'd already blown our chances of label co-operation on this particular video. Still, at least we were closer to being dropped from East/West. For that alone, we felt victorious.

#### **SADDENED**

This song was conceived as a segue-when-needed for our majestic sonic smorgasbord. But with the original concept abandoned, it was abbreviated to a very brief composition.

Willie Dowling (of Honeycrack/Jackdaw 4) asked if he could write a string arrangement around the chord structure. So in a bid to pad it out a bit, this version was cobbled together and used as filler for second of the three ‘Fishing For Luckies’ releases.

Taken out of the context from which it was written, I can't say that the track means that much to me. It's more of a missed opportunity than a genuine curio.

The subject matter deals with the alienation that writers often feel after being cast outside of the band unit. There were times where I'd have happily swapped my gift for a full-time job (obviously complete with the mindset to carry it out). Nowadays, naturally, I wouldn't trade for the world. In fact I'm the only person I know from my hometown who actually stuck with their trade – and one of the very few who still even has a job.

Songwriting has been my best friend for over 35 years. My companion, counsellor and confidant. And I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be here without it.

#### **JOHNNY WASH N' GO**

Something that seemed like a very good idea at 5am. An occurrence that would happen often. I tended not to over-think ideas in the studio. In fact we weren't the sort of band that actually thought much at all - about anything - so we'd just throw things like this together to keep the party going. Some months later our producer at the time, Mark Wallis, came up with a mix of 'Johnny Wash N' Go'. It was something I figured I'd never hear again. To pad out a mystery fourth side of the double (oh, the irony) vinyl version of 'Fishing For Luckies', we crammed it full of bizarre oddities we had from our various recording sessions. So I decided it would be fun to include this.

Sometimes I actually see this title in royalty statements. I fully intend to send all monies to Chuck Berry, Rob Halford and Jimmy Page. Should its collective income ever tip over the £1 sterling mark.

#### **WEEKEND '98 / 29 X THE PAIN '96**

So confused was the organisation at this point that we were coerced by the label into re-recording these two songs for a surefire "hit". It was a decision so misguided that it put me off chasing success ever again. A lesson that still sticks in my craw to this day. I remember the band holed up in Pete Winkelman's Linford Manor miserably ploughing through another pointless recording session. I was homeless at the time and incapable of decision making - unless it was in relation to drugs or alcohol. And even then I was pretty flexible.

I wouldn't say this was the end of The Wildhearts, but it was without doubt the lowest point of our career. The press were calling us "the heavy metal Oasis". My desire had gone and there was only the ever-spinning fall from grace left to endure. I'd also been placed at the top of a rock celebrity death list - just above Lemmy and Iggy Pop. And to be honest I'd have put money on me pegging it first too. At the time of writing, all three of us are still alive.

#### **BEAUTIFUL ME, BEAUTIFUL YOU**

Written in the flat where 'Endless Nameless' would be hastily thrown together at the point where my fondness for drugs turned into a full-blown addiction.

The fact was, the only thing of any seeming beauty in my life was my girlfriend, so I tried to copy Sparks 'Lucky Me, Lucky You' and wrote a love song to my gorgeous lady. Surely things couldn't be as bad as they seemed if I had such beauty and love in my life? Well, not quite.

Turns out that instead of splitting the rent, my girlfriend had been using her share of the cash to keep a junkie ex-boyfriend in paid residence. I'd been solely funding our domestic bliss, while she'd been funding his. In all honesty, I wasn't the kind of guy that kept an eye on my bank balance. I was a junkie. I took drug

money out of a magic hole in the wall that people called a cash machine and let my girlfriend deal with the rent on our behalf. In truth I was hopeless, clueless and asking to be exploited. And my request was duly granted.

When I found out about my partner's cash relief plan, in a move entirely out of character for someone suffering from a hangover, I asked the bank if I could check on my account.

"Which one?" they asked.

I was suitably confused until I found out that my girlfriend wasn't the only one using me as a cash cow. My own accountant had set up another account in my name wherein he'd been misappropriating funds from my earnings. This, by the way, was the same accountancy firm that would soon be exposed in the huge George Michael embezzlement scam. In a haze of confusion and not just a little shock, I took all the from the mystery account - over £50,000 - and handed it to my mother who threw it into a student flat in South Shields. It kept the wolf from the door for a while until the drug habit took over and I sold it for crack about a year later.

Who was I kidding? The world of property management held no interest for me. In fact the world in general looked rotten to the core in my reddened eyes. I planned to crash and burn as sure as the spots before them. I wanted out. But not without first writing the soundtrack to my apocalypse.



Where I will sign  
a new deal,  
make a very  
noisy record,  
try to make the  
audience vomit,  
become a drug  
addict, break two  
ribs, lose out on  
£30million and  
split up the band.



## JUNKENSTEIN

Holed up in a small studio in Henley, Oxfordshire, we were armed with a head full of ideas and a large supply of drugs and alcohol. Ritch and I were setting out to write the blueprint to what was to be our most challenging listening experience to date.

Freshly signed to Mushroom Records, we set about making the sonic equivalent of modern warfare. A declaration of intent or an artistic statement? I'd opt for both. I was bored of modern rock music; it sounded old and tired next to developments in harder electronic music.

Instead of selling my guitars for a Roland TB-303 - a popular move at the time - I wanted to extract the rudimentary sexiness of rock 'n' roll and shackle it to the most raw elements of dance music. I wanted to produce an effect that matched my nihilistic view of the world and pushed the lumpen rock format into the future.

Of course, when we released the album most people were confused. Many claimed that their CD/vinyl was faulty. Or that they simply hated it. There were a few takers, but by and large the opinion from fans wasn't as much constructive criticism as it was that of a baying lynch mob. We had lived up to our promise of making each album different and had fallen onto the blade of our own conviction. And I fucking loved it. I wanted to provoke - surely the aim of all art? I wanted to force an opinion out of people, regardless of how favourable that opinion might be. Someone had to shove a lit firecracker up the arse of this tired genre, and I had less to lose than most.

'Junkenstein' was one of the first examples of how determined we would have to be in order to get our sonic intentions approved. First by our producer Ralph Jezzard, then by the record label. Ralph was more than happy to test audio boundaries and Mushroom Records - in a move utterly alien to us - left us alone to create the album we wanted to create. We had ended up on the perfect label. Now watch us go and screw that up too.

## NURSE MAXIMUM

After the scattershot facelift that was opener 'Junkenstein' I wanted the album to sink into a more groove-orientated mode with which to lure the listener into a false sense of security. This song was in celebration of our increasingly unringed lifestyle and written and recorded while it still felt like a party.

In a tiny studio in Nottingham we began experimenting with drum sounds until we hit on an amazing effect using D-Drum triggers. They were attached to the drum rims to detonate samples of explosions and huge vehicles crashing. These sound effects would sit alongside the natural resonance of the live drum kit. We then fed the entire racket through huge, partially-broken PA speakers and hey presto, an unmistakeable backbone from which to build the entire album. And we fucking loved it.

This approach would produce so much bottom end that we hardly needed to use a bass guitar - which was just as well as our bass guitarist would rarely get involved

in the making of the album. In fact we'd often only know he was in the building because the CCTV outside had picked up on him entering, then vanishing into the toilet for the day. Or being found asleep on the couch in the studio lounge area by the cleaners. Bills would be handed to us for broken elevators which, when contested, would result in us being taken into the security room to watch a video of our errant bass player kicking in the walls of the lift, astounding the studio team who hadn't seen him all day. It was like watching footage of a ghost, a comparison that would draw ever closer in the weeks and months to follow.

Still, at this point the album was an exciting challenge and times were good. MDMA featured on the menu more than heroin and crack/freebase (for now). Most of the joyous rhythmic elements can be put down to tripping our balls off on E while trying to cross Helmet with the Chemical Brothers.

It's hard to make sense of it now, but at the beginning of making 'Endless Nameless', we were still a team who wanted to take the music world by force. But by the end we would be full-blown drug addicts with a very limited shelf life. The reality of drug abuse is a very short story.

### **ANTHEM**

Desperate to involve the rest of the band in the writing process, I carved an unfinished riff and lyric of Danny's into 'Anthem'. It was the first song another band member would sing - something I'd wanted to happen for some time. And Danny looked more like a frontman than I did. It was time for him to shine.

The aforementioned drum effect complemented this rag 'n' bone riff perfectly. As we sat for hours just listening whilst pilled-up and deep in sonic love, I knew I was onto something. We were following this unique pathway of sound that was naturally presenting itself. I just needed to hear it when we all came down the next day - to make sure it was actually this good. It was a relief to discover it was. This was a new sound in rock, as likely to change the world as it was to offend it. To me, that seemed like a pretty good gamble. This was turbo rock. This was the sonic warfare I'd promised myself we'd create. Surely everyone wanted something more violent than the generic guitar music that was even struggling to gain traction on radio anymore? Surely? There was only one way to find out.

While we were allowed to play this song live on *Top Of The Pops* (swapping the line "so good to be so fucked up" to "so good to mix your brown with rocks": a reference to the crack/heroin speedballs that Danny and I were into around the time of appearance), the video for this song became more legendary than the single itself.

Booking a large room the size of an aircraft hangar, I decided that half the video budget would go into the actual video and half would fund the after-party. I invited all of our friends to appear in the video and no sooner had the final shot been completed, the area would become a massive rave. It was magical. Perfect.

Ritch personally took around a huge bag of pure MDMA to the collective ravers, the lights pointed toward the makeshift dance floor and the PA blasted out a DJ set until morning. Quite easily the best video shoot of my life. Most likely the same for the lives of those in attendance too.

**URGE**

The second song to feature another band member singing lead vocals, 'Urge' showed off the vocal chops of Jef. He handled the verse and I stepped in for the bridge and the shouty chorus - my *forté*. I thought this song might have been the one to propel us to a stature befitting our sonic ambitions: a pile-driving riff followed by an even more monstrous guitar onslaught. Surely it would fill the dancefloor of any self-respecting rock club? This assumption would, of course, prove to be inaccurate.

I even heard the song reviewed on Radio One's Round Table. The editor of *NME* openly creamed over it, praying to be told it was "the new one from U2." Upon finding out it was The Wildhearts, a sigh of disappointment could be heard leaking into his microphone. Our reputation preceded us. And that wasn't a good thing, as Mushroom were about to find out. The single was a flop and even our regular appearance on *Top Of The Pops* was cancelled due to poor sales. Our new sound was literally driving fans away from stores due to its overly-bombastic approach. Being reared on Big Black and Ministry, that puzzled me completely. How could rock music be too loud or too offensive? It made no sense.

Nowadays, in a post-dubstep world, the sub-bass drops in this song seem standard. But back then, "bigger" certainly didn't translate as "better" in the ears of the consumer. Rock was to stay staid and mainstream. The old guard and the pre-greying old guard youth had spoken.

I still love playing this song live, and have finally mastered the range to tackle the verse vocals - something I was unable to do back then. The promotional video to 'Urge' was made by myself and video director Philip Richardson (with whom I made the 'Lovebank' porno). It features lots of animals fucking. A subliminal theme, maybe? I have no idea, but it made sense with a glass pipe stuck to my lips.

**PISSJOY**

Once again running with the more traditional rock 'n' roll formula, 'Pissjoy' was written to assure hardcore fans that we hadn't gone completely insane and that I still had an ear for melody. I still see no crime in coupling a catchy pop melody with some ultra-noise. In fact I love it and wish it was a genre in itself. I had no problem with noisecore or twee pop either - none at all - but sweet 'n' savoury is where the magic lies for me. Especially when experimenting with frequencies, oscillation and hertz. I was listening to a lot of Flaming Lips at the time and became fascinated by what they were doing that wasn't technically musical. I was intrigued by bending the tempo of oscillating frequencies using discordant notes - as heard in the breakdown section of this song.

I still like to meddle with sonic vibrations when making music. I'm always incredibly honoured when I'm told that a song changed someone's mood - be it happy or sad - despite the lyrics. That's usually down to me messing around with the stuff in the backing track that you don't actually hear once the bells and whistles go on top. And while you don't necessarily hear it, you most definitely feel it.

My curiosity with sonics reached its apex on the 'Endless Nameless' tour. I employed two soundmen: one to mix the band and one to mix the frequencies/

noise. The goal was to make the audience either vomit or shit. The full effect was only achieved in a couple of instances – but those tiny victories smelled of success. Well – shit, vomit and success, to be completely honest.

Directly affecting the audience outside of the regular volume battering reminded me of an idea I had when we first started The Wildhearts. I wanted to blow LSD into the audience in the dry ice. I even started shopping for liquid acid and strawberry flavouring that I could mix with the hot water into which we'd dip the dry ice to create the effect. With the benefit of hindsight, I think it's a very good thing that I was unsuccessful on that occasion. The hertz frequency experiment, however, was far safer. Especially as it usually failed.

### SOUNDOG BABYLON

Rapidly running out of song ideas that would make the album cut (many instead making quality B-sides), I would frantically write specifically in order to lift any lull in the album flow. 'Soundog Babylon' was such a song. Brought to the session to add tension to the mid-paced nature that the album was beginning to display, it was intended to be a noisefest that would drag the listener into an intense drug-like experience. Was it a successful endeavour? I've no idea – I was far too high to care. But at least the intention was there.

Recorded amid the progression of our own drug problems, a typical day would begin by sending someone out to score. They'd then take the best part of a day to get back, having first fixed themselves up. Then we'd have enough crack to smoke and enough heroin to chase without crashing too hard or falling asleep. And then we could work all night.

At one point we discovered that we'd blown a fader (a channel on the mixing desk) – revealing the reason why everything that went through that channel sounded so distorted. There are no points for guessing which channel became the session favourite. It was used in favour over all others. Everything seemed to sound amazing when fed through this channel – in fact a large part of the album sound is because of this magic, broken channel. I still have no idea how 'Endless Nameless' sounds so coherent within its white-noise attack – or even how it got finished. The lunatics had most definitely taken over the asylum and had not done too bad a job at running the place.

'Soundog Babylon' is therefore a song written about drugs, recorded on drugs with the sole intention of making the listener feel like they're on drugs. But at least we were still using them together at this point. It wasn't until the drugs started using us that splits within the band became noticeable. The irony was that we'd drink together, take MDMA together and smoke crack together. But heroin dragged people from the team and off into their own world. Once heroin addicts find other heroin addicts, the world they knew starts to drift and vanish. There are usually only three heroin stories. The other two end in jail or death. I wouldn't come to understand this first hand until some years later, at which point I'd lose much more than a band.

Over the years I've witnessed this drug destroy not only the lives of the users, but also the lives of those around them. Not many addicts come through to write about their experiences in a book. I'm really fucking lucky. Most didn't make it through at all.

But everyone who gets involved with heroin loses something precious in the deal. That is standard procedure.

## NOW IS THE COLOUR

Inspired by the Lee Harvey Oswald Band. This was one of the first songs recorded for the session, back when we were laying down demos, experimenting with drum effects, and partying like monkeys. Based around a singular revolving riff, this was a fun song to play live.

I wanted to recreate the radio effect on the vocal in a live setting. So we strapped a violin mic to my throat, hidden underneath a large dog collar. But that created so much feedback that we scrapped the idea in favour of two microphones – one normal and one fed through a distortion pedal. Trial and error took up a lot of time. When it finally came to mastering this effect, I would be playing with two broken ribs and could barely reach a high enough volume to trigger the voice gate/effect. Let me explain.

The injury was sustained whilst playing a festival in Finland. The security took an instant dislike to us. They regarded us as hopelessly wasted British drunks washed up on their shore. Such was their animosity, they even decided to take it out on the audience. Within three songs, the fans had started to climb the stage and dive off. As soon as we saw one fan dragged from the stage and punched in the face, we acted in unison. Downing instruments, we decided to dish out some of the same medicine to the security guards. I started by hitting the closest one, standing stage right. Talking him off guard with a right hook, I was suddenly aware of a huge blow from my right side and instantly felt my feet leave the stage. The blow – it was later revealed – was Danny diving into the fray and knocking me, the security guard and himself right off the stage. The fall to the floor was about 12 feet. Contact with the ground broke two of my ribs upon impact. Through the excruciating pain, all I could make out was chaos erupting between the crowd and the security. A riot was taking place. After being agonisingly scooped up and lifted to safety under one arm of our own security man (who was unaware of my broken ribs) and with Danny under his other arm, my final vision was of the Finnish security guard running for his dear life, with a huge angry crowd running after him looking ready to relieve him of it. I then blacked out.

The next day we found that we were headline news in the Finnish newspapers. It was an incident that still sees us attract a decent crowd in Helsinki. Little to do with the music. Or at least the three songs we played that day anyway. I carried on with the tour, despite the broken ribs. Despite our headline news status in Finland, the UK press merely complained that I was a lethargic frontman. Singing with broken ribs doesn't make for a very energetic performance, granted. But if I'd cancelled the shows, no doubt I would have been accused of prima donna rock star behaviour. It was increasingly obvious that any love the UK press had ever shown for the band had long since dried up. We were now simply an irritant. Ironically, if that's how they considered us, then we had the perfect soundtrack to really annoy them. Sadly, drug-addled and thoroughly bedraggled, we barely had a working band with which to carry out the threat.

The first song recorded on the album. I distinctly recall cutting up the rapid rhythmic part in the middle section, to the absolute exasperation of everyone in the studio. Ignoring comments like, "you're wasting your time", I steadfastly chopped until finished. Whereupon the entire studio sat back impressed and allowed me free rein to conduct the rest of the album without criticism. Even at this stage, I'd find myself fighting to gain control - even though I was the only one actually bringing in material to record.

I still love that rhythmic part which features the only sample I'd ever heard on a rock album from a Lucio Fulci (Italian horror maestro) splatter movie. A genre and director I was obsessed with. Still am. I digress.

I also remember a very odd, and entirely unrelated incident around this time which was caused by a vivid dream. I dreamt I had the winning numbers for the lottery and they were all between 20 and 29. Waking up with a start, I began trying to convince the band and studio engineers to invest money into my premonition. Not being someone known for my psychic ability, everyone quite understandably kept their money, and spent it on drinks at the pub. Saddled up to the bar later that day, as the lottery numbers were being called out on TV, we still watched out of natural curiosity. A curiosity which rapidly turned into abject disbelief and ultimately, utter horror. Every ball that rolled out of the tumbling lottery machine was in the 20s. It was also a rollover of \$50 million. And no one claimed it that week.

Not only was this the last time I would ever take part in a lottery of any kind, it was the first of a few incidents in my life that made absolutely no sense, yet would appear consistently. Incidents that I will relay throughout this book. Things involving highly unlikely scenarios and many near-death experiences. Coincidence or something more? You can decide on that one. Still, it did underline - albeit in tragic-comic fashion - how Lady Luck seemed unlikely to ever point a delicately manicured digit in the direction of The Wildhearts. Even fate appeared to have given up on us. Our game was up. The end was just another process that we stubbornly refused to accept.

### THUNDE~~F~~UCK

Although not yet at the lowest point of The Wildhearts demise - although it was certainly en route - all signs pointing to the career cul-de-sac which we were heading down were out in force. In flashing neon. With klaxons. And still we shut our eyes and ploughed on. Lack of team input. Errant band members. An apathetic UK press. It all painted a very bleak picture. Eventually the cold truth of the band's drug habits indicated that at least one of us (most probably two) was going to die if we didn't face the stark reality of the situation.

I wanted the end of the album to act as a premonition for the inevitable goodbye. Something we'd be unable to say once the album was finished. Naturally, once 'Endless Nameless' was released to radio and TV indifference, touring was the only plausible means of promotion. But we didn't have a group stable enough to honour touring opportunities. I doubt we'd have even managed a full length set. We even asked Paul Simonon of The Clash to stand in on bass at one point at the suggestion

### WHY YOU LIE

of label boss Korda Marshall. But we were told he was a painter and didn't play any more. Still, in the back of my mind, even if The Clash's bass-playing demi-God had actually accepted the gig, it would have only been a temporary fix - like a sticking plaster on a slit wrist.

We were still a team. Or at least, I still cared about the guys in the band. And I knew that giving more money to The Wildhearts would have simply been ammunition for Russian roulette. The decision was made to disband and save at least one life. It was a tough decision to make. But not, I imagined, as difficult as living with someone's death on your conscience.

The disbanding of The Wildhearts has always been a running joke amongst critics of the band. The truth, however, was far more poignant. It was a matter of doing the honourable thing by a friend I'd come to know as a brother. The facts were simple. A happy-go-lucky kid - one I'd spent an enormous amount of time with over the years - barely resembled the person I once knew. I saw an obvious outcome to this worsening scenario: the death of a friend. So I refused to carry on. I acted on the paranoia and called a halt on the whole sordid mess. Over. Done. Finis. I still maintain that all members of The Wildhearts are currently alive as a result of this decision.





CHAPTER FOUR B:  
ENDLESS NAMELESS  
THE B-SIDES

## THE SONG FORMALLY KNOWS AS?

Ritch was the first member of The Wildhearts to present a complete song for consideration. To this day, I haven't written a better set of lyrics than he pulled out of the bag for this track. "I want to know how a blind man knows when his arse is clean". This bizarre take on the mysteries of the world still amazes me.

I added the chorus and messed with the arrangement a little, but Ritch's writing debut was mainly just that. I simply helped it cross the road. While it appeared as a B-side for the 'Anthem' single, it was actually written some years earlier, during the recording of 'I Wanna Go Where The People Go'. It was laid down without a chorus because the whole band were shit-faced drunk. That original version included reluctant guest spots from everyone in the studio control room at the time. Including drum tech Martin Palmer, whose face appeared on the bank note given away with the 'If Life Is Like A Lovebank' b/w 'Geordie In Wonderland' single. Incidentally, the re-recorded track was almost called 'Funny Farm'. A move I'm very glad we decided against.

## FUGAZI (Do The Fake)

This track was inspired by a brief spat between the singer from 3 Colours Red and myself. He made some comment in the press about The Wildhearts being somehow inferior to their own output. He claimed that I wrote about "shit" and they didn't. The dig was somewhat ironic as I'd originally introduced the two main guys in 3CR – Pete and Chris – to each other being as they were both big fans of our band. Go figure.

I never expect gratitude in this business, but its absence is not something that sits well with me either. Anyway, while that incident spurred me to pick up the guitar, the song actually tackled issues with other members of bands who also took pot-shots at our ailing group. Some of whom were even past members. Incidentally, whether it's important or not, it's maybe worth noting that none of the bands who inspired this song went on to achieve anything like The Wildhearts – neither in output nor sustained popularity.

There is a spitefulness to this song that I adore. I wish it had been written earlier in order to be included on 'Endless Nameless'. Once again, a B-side that proves to be every bit as good as any album track.

## KOMBOID

Another case in point – written too late to make the album. This killer track would be resigned to non-album status despite housing one of the best riffs of that entire period. Written from the point of view of a crack addict (a recurring theme considering they featured regularly in my daily life), it traced the paranoia and desperation inherent in crack/freebase addiction. Looking back on that period of my life, it's hard to put the struggle into perspective. The life of a crackhead is such an all-encompassing yet soulless trial that it's almost impossible for recovered addicts to compare it to post-addiction life. It really does seem like someone else's story.

Today I put the time I used to waste sucking on a glass pipe to more practical use – like being a father, earning money and making more music. The sheer amount of

music I've made since indicates just how much time was wasted to addiction. It's little wonder that people often say I write too much material.

Ironically I used to suck up that grey smoke and fantasise about the life I now live. Creative and content – even respected. My current life is something that I will never take for granted. Not an hour goes by that isn't flavoured by gratitude. It's the motivation behind pushing myself to the limit of my abilities. This is the reason why I don't work with anyone who tells me something can't be done.

#### GENIUS PENIS

Hot on the heels of "The Song Formerly Known As?", this is Ritch's second attempt at a full set of lyrics. And a solid indication that we had a budding Wordsworth within our ranks. Again, I simply applied a little polish, added a chorus (for which I brought in the lovely Vix Fuzzbox to sing) and hey-presto, as perfect a B-side as would ever be needed. I'd have loved for Ritch to explore his writing side more; his ear for a great turn of phrase is as natural as it is classic and I'm a big fan.

#### KILL ME TO DEATH

Featuring the mighty Devin Townsend on vocals, this one was written and recorded around the time of 'Anthem' and 'Now Is The Colour'. It just lacked the qualities needed to make the cut despite the amount of fun it was to create.

A nice slab of industrial madness. Nothing wrong with that at all. It was also a snapshot of a great weekend making silly noises and getting high on our own supply, back when we were having fun. I always relish working with Devin, but have yet to actually write with him. Which is why a song of his called 'Christeen' (which appears on his 'Infinity' album, and is co-credited to me) will not make this book. I love Devin dearly, but I will say that he's way too generous. I had nothing to do with creating 'Christeen' apart from being in the same country at the same time. I don't even think I was in the same room as he was when he wrote it. Still, nice fella. Nutty as a tin of sheep. Makes me look like a lazy bastard.

Where I move  
to LA, give up  
drugs, join a gym,  
have my kneecaps  
threatened,  
pretend to be gay,  
discover the  
internet,  
upset the police  
and take  
up drugs  
once again.



## SING LIKE A GIRL

After disbanding The Wildhearts, breaking up with my girlfriend, losing my London flat and being forced to examine my increasing reliance on smoking cocaine, I found myself couch-surfing at the invites of kind friends. Rudderless and without any plans, I woke up one morning on the sofa of artist Ray Zell, walked out of the door to the nearest travel agent and asked to be put on the next flight to somewhere warm. "There's a flight to Los Angeles leaving this evening", they said. With that, I packed up what I needed, ditched what I didn't, and boarded a plane to California where I would live for the next six months.

Having nowhere to stay – but with the intention of getting a band together – I booked a room at the Beverly Laurel hotel. Then I called everyone I knew in town who could put me in touch with local musicians. Thinking the place would be teeming with players, I was astonished to find that the few I met had either just got out of jail, or wanted payment before getting their guitar out of its case. Neither scenario bode well for long-term intentions of success. Still, I did reconnect with an old friend, Ric Browde. Ric had worked with The Wildhearts on a demo session – at the time we originally auditioned singers – when I drove a tractor into the swimming pool of Jacobs Studios in Surrey. He was instrumental in getting the embryonic Wildhearts together helping us out financially and eventually getting us signed to ATOO Records on the strength of a demo intended only for further singer auditions. He remembered me fondly enough to give me a room at his posh Beverly Hills 90210 home.

I left the couch I was sleeping on and within 48 hours I was living in a fucking mansion. Taking chances, it would seem, was where they kept the gold. Taking chances agreed with me. But taking chances wasn't looking likely to produce rock musicians of any calibre in this town. LA, to my utter astonishment, was a veritable wasteland when it came to finding musicians.

After getting my addictions in order, the next step was to join a gym. I'd never even been to a gym before and I was ill-suited for financial responsibilities of any kind. All too soon I ignored the gym payments—to the tune of \$5000—and once I was introduced to the owners of said gymnasium, the threat of broken legs forced me into making a speedy decision. I'd make an acoustic album – for exactly \$500 – for The Wildhearts' old A&R man from East/West, Dante Bonutto. That was the ticket. Not ideal, but at least I'd be able to walk off the regret.

It turned out that working with Dante again would throw up some very fortuitous opportunities. Before it would – once again – crash and burn in the traditional fashion. It wasn't until after getting in touch with a friend of Ric Browde – a pop rock-loving oddball called Alex Kane – that the decision to fly back to UK to record an acoustic album became concrete. A few songs were written instantly, the first of which being 'She's So Taboo' (based on a porn mag lying around his apartment) and we were off. I'd barely known Alex a month before we were in a band together. Kind of.

We began recording in an old converted church called Blackwing studios owned by the genial Eric Radcliffe – the Yazoo producer and namesake to their 'Upstairs At Eric's' album. Eric was a wonderful man and as supportive to our odd little album

as anyone could possibly be. Even bringing in his daughters for guest spots (most notably on the "Do you like people being nasty to clams?" section).

With the vibe very electric for an acoustic album, we soon began getting visits from various musicians wanting to bask in the weirdness with us. They included Prodigy drummer Kieron Pepper who would eventually put beats and drums to every song we'd laid down. He often recorded live - without click tracks - sometimes even after the guitars had already been recorded. What began as a simple acoustic album turned into something far more intriguing, disturbing and, ultimately, interesting.

Guests also included Mediæval Bæbes/Miranda Sex Garden chanteuse Katherine Blake, who allowed her behind to be used as a percussion instrument for the lengthy album outro. 'Sing Like A Girl' - the first song and intended album title - was an excerpt from a live studio jam that ended up making sense somewhere along the line. No electric instruments were used on the album - apart from Kieron's samples - so it was still theoretically acoustic.

Anyway, the gym bill was paid and I walked away from the experience with something that bore no resemblance to my original musical plan whatsoever. This would turn into an approach I'd soon adopt as a style. A plan is just the reason to put your shoes on - where they lead you is a different story entirely. Especially in my case.

#### MESSAGE TO GERI

The last thing I wanted was to write anything remotely serious for what was fast becoming a Ween-inspired flight of lunacy. Geri Halliwell was the cutest of the Asda-glamour bunch that made up the Spice Girls. She was then the current face of the UK due to a Union Jack dress she'd squeezed herself into for the 1997 Brit awards. She was also unlikely enough of a topic to write a Clam Abuse song about.

I got in contact with a friend with laryngeal cancer who was more than happy to come down and put vocals on the verse through his voice prosthesis valve. Via the medium of good times and questionable taste, we had what I considered to be a disco classic. I even had an amazing video in mind, featuring spinning air stewards and fireworks (which sadly, the budget wouldn't allow). Stick a choir of Swiss yodellers on the chorus and our potential gay smash had every ingredient you could possibly ignore. And ignore it people most certainly did.

I guess being from a hard rock background - as I regretfully was - homo-erotic humour was still one of the few taboos considered verboten within these particular leather-bound ranks. Hell, Rob Halford hadn't come out yet. Truth was - and is - that I am irritatingly heterosexual. Immovably so. I haven't even enjoyed gay advances at any time in my life. I don't fancy men, and they patently don't fancy me.

Why, then, not poke fun at the very concept of sexuality, seeing as it's such a mysterious and unfathomable beast? Personally, I can't think of anything funnier.

#### UNLUCKY IN LOVE

I was desperate to write country music, having dabbled in the genre with The Wildhearts' 'Bad Time To Be Having A Bad Time'. It has always been a style of music

as close to my heart as loud guitars or beauteous pop. So here – on this unclassifiable album – was my chance. We just needed a singer. In the studio next door was a shy young girl to whom Alex had taken a fancy. Asked if she liked country music, she replied, “I’ve never heard any.” I instructed her to try and sing like a cowgirl and she delivered a performance I consider to be one of the most genuine and moving I’ve ever had the honour of recording.

I’d be lying if I said that I wasn’t perversely pleased with these lyrics. Dumb and in very bad taste, this wouldn’t be my last foray into the dark humour that could be conjured up in this genre. But for now, innocence was the captain and I was enjoying the ride. Sure, I was drinking again and smoking a little weed, but certainly nothing that was going to derail the session or cause undue concern. Not yet, anyway. Vying for the throne of the first song written about a poisonous vagina, the story reveals that the unlucky owner of the murderous genitalia finds comfort in the arms of another woman. I just couldn’t keep that homoerotic subtext down. Yes, I’m still very fond – not to mention rather proud – of this song.

#### **COME TOGETHER**

Obviously a play on the words and theme of The Beatles’ ‘Come Together’, but set in the newly-flowering cyber age in which I found myself immersed. The lyrics seem a little bozo now, but I swear no-one was writing in computer terms at this point. I had latched onto internet activity reasonably early and was already communicating with fans on a regular basis; conducting Q&A sessions and writing blogs about anything that sailed through my head. I loved the immediacy of internet social contact and have maintained a close relationship with my online community ever since. In fact I simply can’t fathom why any musician wouldn’t. Keeping in contact with the very people who buy your music seems like common sense to me. If only to say thank you for buying my music.

I’m staggered to find that so many musicians don’t understand this simple equation; the fans are there to stay if you’re good to them. They want you to do well. In fact they’re the only people around you who genuinely do. Record companies will come and go, managers will show their true colours in time, and the market is so mercurial that any hopes of remaining relevant are, quite frankly, fantasy. Never having been a fan of Tolkien, I remain in the meat ‘n’ potatoes world of graft and gratitude. In which I hope to stay long after I’m gone. That’s in terms of musical legacy as well as inspiration that I hope to pass on.

The lyric is about a fellow who’s frustrated with simply being sent pictures of his cyber love and longing for actual contact. It wasn’t only semi-biographical in this new medium of instant communication, but would become painfully, hilariously and fatefully prophetic. However, the internet was a source of amusement and I embraced it with characteristic gusto.

#### **FALLING IN BED WITH YOU AGAIN**

Another song about doomed relationships. The kind that are based as much on sexual relief as the temporary comfort of the doggedly single.

This was my drumming debut on an album (if you don’t count the intro to

'Pisjov'). Being a frustrated drummer, the only reason I hadn't got better at this glorious instrument was the cost and impracticality of owning a drum kit. Christ, when I was a kid my mother would rap my fingers for tapping on the table. I imagine I'd have been stood against the back wall and shot if I'd started hammering away on a snare drum. But the urge never left me and, in possession of a fairly deft sense of rhythm, I attacked my percussive maiden voyage like a dog off a leash. In places it sounds like it.

Still, I was designing my future. In which I could play any role I wanted. In this song I wanted to be Cozy Powell. Powerful, masterful, the very bedrock of a song or band. But in typical arse-backwards fashion, we'd recorded the acoustic backing tracks first and had to load on the rest of the instruments - including drums - afterwards.

So even my first performance as the very engine behind the music would be an unorthodox one by sticking the cart before the horse before the fucking steam engine. Another lesson I have embraced and developed: the art of flexibility.

#### SUNDAY DRIVING ON A THURSDAY AFTERNOON

A hazy, pot-induced co-write with Alex. Or Clint Abuse, as he would be renamed. Working on the pseudonyms that we'd adopt for the characters in Clam Abuse fell into place within one email. I've always considered working hard an entirely different entity to something that is simply hard work. If ideas don't come easily, then let them go. And Clam Abuse came hilariously easy. I was to be Clam Savage, a name of which I was quite fond and would like to have adopted. Instead I would climb slowly back on the horse that was addiction and forget about this plan completely. In turn, I'd forget about pretty much everything.

#### FOR THAT GIRL EVERYTHING IS GROOVY

People often ask if I'll make another Clam Abuse album. I always say no, based purely on the fact that we already did all the jokes on this first album. Although I dearly wanted to sing this chorus in a thick German accent - the one chuckle that we neglected. I'm not sure whether it was Alex's Germanic background that nixed the idea - or that we simply got stoned and forgot - but it would have been a pointless, tasteless and above all, fun addition to this hyperkinetic oddity of a song. I had originally intended the links between the songs to join the tracks - like 'Market Harbour' - making the album one long song. Again, this request was lost in translation due to the copious amounts of marijuana used to make the album.

Strangely, I've never really got on with pot. I have no idea why I ever smoked it. Or why I kept on smoking it and even occasionally still smoke it. I understand that a relaxed euphoria is generally experienced by most smokers, yet my reaction is a state of mild paralysis, distorted self-awareness and paranoia. And hunger. Extreme hunger. It makes me want to eat the entire contents of the fridge, then start licking the fridge itself.

I'm fully aware of how ridiculous it sounds to try something over and over again, hoping for different results. I guess I'm desperate to find a bond with this most infuriating of plants. Of all the drugs that I got along with immediately (amphetamine, crack cocaine, crystal meth), this is the one that turns me into a helpless vegetable with just enough human awareness to think that it's going to

die. And this is the one you can't get arrested for? Maybe I have the law to actually thank for being drug free today - and more creative than I've ever been.

#### **SHE'S SO TABOO**

The first song written with the intention of seeing if Alex and I could write a song together. Based on no-one specifically, it was literally one of those "pass me the guitar" moments, scanning the surroundings and singing about the first thing that came into view - namely a bondage porn magazine. I used a few girls that I'd known for imagery within the song, but for the most part it was just a bit of fun that ended up being one of the more popular tracks on the album. There was even talk of this being released as a single by Infernal Records. A decision I considered stranger than anything Alex and I had brought to the table - and we were supposed to be the weird ones. But I was game for anything at this point. I was finally having fun.

I will say that this song was a lot of fun to play live, at least on the one tour we did to support the album. Now that tour was a lively one. I don't remember much about a lot of it, other than spending the whole time cooking up crack in the back of the van while we travelled. Oh, and getting arrested in York for calling a policeman "fat". He was fat. I told him to "Get on a treadmill and stop making British bobbies look like slobs". After all, you wouldn't get very far being a fat criminal would you? So why should the police allow their own lot to be incapable of chasing a skinny robber a few miles down the road? Miserable bastard. He locked me up for the night, though. Most probably because his fellow coppers around him were laughing with me. I had the ones inside laughing too. Turns out he became morose when his wife ran off with another policeman. Bet the other fella was thin.

Anyway, I digress. We ended up with a ton of press because of the incident and my legend as a troublemaker remained accidentally intact.

#### **THERE'S ALWAYS SOMEONE MORE FUCKED UP THAN YOU**

One of the more classy songs in this collection (who am I kidding? It's the only remotely classy song) and one that actually makes sense.

Out of typical character, I wanted to make the final song on the album an almost sentimental affair. How irritating it would be to come away from this confusing sensory experience feeling strangely moved. That was my logic, anyway. Whether it worked or not is in the ears and heart of the beholder.

I wouldn't make a habit of recording comedy albums, but I would return to the formula at times when I simply couldn't help myself. Taking the piss is, after all, the final word in self expression. Saying that you really don't care - and proudly standing up to the ensuing ridicule - is, in my rule book, more punk rock than any haircut or tuneless screaming. Those are just merely attempts to seem cool. Appearing completely uncool and not giving a flying shit about the effect on your 'reputation' (a hideous word) or the criticism of your detractors? Now that to me is the essence of punk. Or at least that is my definition of punk.

So I maintain that making the Clam Abuse album was more punk rock than dressing in Seditious and copying the posturing of The Clash. Way more punk rock, in fact.



Welcome  
Taboo  
I Think I Love You  
Message to Geri  
.Com Together  
Give the Girl  
Fall In Bed  
Sunday Driver  
Let's get it on  
Skychaser  
For That Girl  
Godzilla  
Beautiful  
 Fucked Up

THE DUCHESS  
71 Vicar Lane, Leeds, LS1 6CJ.  
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Where I will do  
time in notorious  
Thai jail 'The  
Bangkok Hilton',  
move back to  
London, quit drugs  
again, refuse to  
leave Japan, sign  
a big management  
deal, get the girl,  
make her pregnant  
and take up drugs  
again, again.



## **SONIC SHAKE**

I was still aimlessly bouncing around – albeit internationally – in those days and yet finding myself returning to Los Angeles as home. Especially since landing an adorable apartment with Guns N' Roses photographer Gene Kirkland. Complete with my own personal four-poster bed and freebase habit. Gene didn't touch drugs or alcohol so I'd hide in my room for days with blankets blocking the gap under the door and the window slightly ajar. With the acrid plastic smell of burning rocks permeating the toxic fog within.

Inside this room I was writing. Writing blogs, writing songs, writing lists of things I was going to do. Wildhearts royalties were still keeping my dealer happy and my reputation – for better or for worse – continued to propel me regularly around the world. I was going nowhere at a troubling speed but bumbling around in paradise. The USA wasn't the worst plan B I could think of. I was starting to see why so many of my friends in LA had long since forgotten what they came here to do.

Then on one of my regular promo visits to UK, I'd meet a new manager, an old tour manager of mine (called Gigs), a new love interest (Angie), then found myself a new flat in the UK before my return trip to LA. The universe, it would appear, had plans. I regarded everything I had in my suitcase as everything I'd need to start afresh. Instead of returning 'home,' I just discarded the place in LA – along with guitars, clothes, belongings, my car and my four-poster bed, never to return. In fact the only thing I kept was the drug habit. I still have no idea whatever happened to my stuff out there, but I hope someone is enjoying playing my white BC Rich Bich. That thing cost more than the car.

I've never minded leaving guitars in foreign countries that I called home for a while, never to see again. I've done it many times to many guitars – as you will read. I guess it started in the late 80s. A band I'd originally left London to join (a small glam/pop outfit, based in Worcester, called Ipanema Katz) had forcibly taken back a BC Rich bass I'd saved up a year's wages to buy. Word had got to the Katz that I was thinking of leaving the band, so they figured they'd expedite the process by involving some heavies to hand me a good beating and take my new bass along the way.

My heavy-handed removal from the band – and more importantly the bass – prompted me to return home and back to my first instrument, the guitar. This would be a fortuitous move and one that saw me go from strength-to-strength in the time that many players (including those in Ipanema Katz) have long ceased trading. Since this experience, I've always trusted the concept of starting anew – for which I have the members of a little-known glam band to thank. Most of whom apparently became ardent Wildhearts fans. Oh irony, you loveable wee scamp. Here, let me get you a drink.

I'd been beavering away on a bunch of new tunes in LA, storing them up for a later date and reining in the more rock-orientated ones for a solo album. Until I was reminded of the sage words of advice from Mark Dearnley, back in the 'Earth vs' days. "Record everything".

With a tasty set of tracks bubbling on the stove, I still needed that big opener. Something with pyrotechnic intention. Something that sounded like the intro to the biggest rock show on earth. 'Sonic Shake' came to me on a walk through Camden and seemed to fit the job description perfectly.

Within the month I was visiting Japan on a promo tour, passionately enthusing about my bombastic new song to some friends in the industry. Obviously the hard sell worked because suddenly Mercury Records were showing an active interest. They asked me to provide some demo recordings. I drunkenly agreed, thinking I'd play all the instruments myself instead of using session players. They agreed to fund the demo session. Starting at 9am the following morning. Fuck.

I'd played drums on one Clam Abuse track, and a Wildhearts intro, but to play on three songs - two of which I hadn't even written yet - for a potential major label deal? This was new. A fresh level of fear that oddly excited me. Soon, I'd develop a taste for being put on the spot. Now that feeling of fear is something I chase with every opportunity.

I quickly scrambled together two more songs that evening, which became '(Whatever Happened To) Rock 'N' Roll Girls' and 'Brain Sugar (Mind Honey)', to give it its original title. I bluffed my way through the session using sheer bravado. Before my return flight to the UK had left the tarmac, I had signed a lucrative deal to record my first solo album. I remember being back in London soon after. Broke and hungry, at a cash machine, I checked if I had £5 in the bank for a sandwich. The screen flashed up more numbers than I'd ever seen connected to my account. I couldn't even count how much it was telling me was there. My mathematic comfort zone maxed out after three zeros - this number looked like binary code.

I would be able to return to my beloved Blackwing Studios (a deconsecrated church) in London and record the whole album with a producer of my choice. I could pick pretty much anyone in the world to work with, but I had only a single name in mind. There was only one living man whom I held in such awe as to be deemed Godlike. And that was Cardiacs resident genius and guru, Tim Smith. To be honest, I just wanted to meet him. This seemed the perfect opportunity.

## DIVINE IMPERFECTION

Once my new management had set up a meeting between a very casual Tim Smith and a very nervous Ginger Wildheart, preparations began to find the players to flesh out this ultrasonic dream of mine. I'd been very impressed by a guy called Blads (Andy Selway). He was the drummer of Sugarsnatch, a band which I'd been introduced to by Danny. They also featured a very friendly cockney named Tom Spencer on vocals and guitar. All three would go on to form The Yo-Yo's. Blads had the power of Fitch Battersby but with a very technical approach that reminded me of Sepultura's Igor Cavalera - of whom I was a huge fan. I had found my drummer.

When asked "who is the best bass player you know?" Tim wasted no time in suggesting Cardiacs guitar player, Jon Poole. A guitarist playing bass? Well okay, but only if Tim Smith says so.

After blasting through the three Japanese demo songs together, it was obvious

that Tim was bang on the money: we had a very tight three piece indeed. So much so in fact, that I started warming to the idea of this being a band as opposed to a solo album. As I was using the name Silver Ginger as my online moniker and there were three of us, why not call the band Silver Ginger 5? Yep. Cocaine. Helluva drug.

I'd also fallen deeper in love with Angie, the new lady in my life. A half Filipino girl who I'd had a crush on since seeing her play drums in a band called Fluffy. They appeared on the same bill as us at the Sex Pistols reunion at Finsbury Park three years earlier. Very pretty and very direct, Angie had a taste for partying and a punk rock heart. We became inseparable and she moved into my new London flat.

To welcome Angie to my abode I bought her a Pug – my idea of a house warming/relationship-establishing gift. Angie named her Posie. The dog would go on to cost ten times her original price in vet bills, but Posie was family. Still, talk would often turn to what was truly missing from our lives and we both agreed that a child might fill the void. That emptiness which we both felt to some extent dictated our wayward tendencies. Neither of us had even wanted kids until this point, but our imperfections – the one thing that gave us such a candid and honest connection – convinced us that we'd make pretty cool parents.

#### **ANYWAY BUT MAYBE**

Things were starting to work themselves out nicely: my new album, my new flat, my new love life. I was beginning to see a very definite light for the first time in too long. But first I'd have to take care of some unfinished business with the dark side. Prior to meeting Angie, there was a very ugly period when I moved back to London, to a new flat, the address of which didn't even officially exist. Knocked together within the bones of someone's old office, it was a money-making scam for a highly dodgy landlord. Security was non-existent, guaranteeing a fresh break-in every time I left home for longer than an evening. It got to a point where I didn't even clear up the post-burgled mess anymore. I'd just make a space within the discarded debris and load up another pipe.

I was smoking freebase for days on end, alone and lost in a fearless quest for oblivion. I thought nothing of my personal welfare. Like for example, breaking up an ugly fight between a couple, in the street one night directly below my window. On confronting them, the guy pulled a knife on me. The bruised girl suddenly sided with her aggressor, shielding herself behind him. Both of them spat out threats in my direction. At this point I held my arms up and just shouted "FUCKING DO IT."

The vicious misogyny I'd experienced as a kid (which I'll describe in more detail latter) made female abuse impossible for me to ignore – even when situations became as suicidal as that one outside my flat. Surrendering to my fate with absolute authenticity, my willingness to vacate this mortal coil took the knife-wielding woman beater by shock. The couple scampered off up Camden Road, every bit as confused as I was. "I know where you live," he shouted as he hoofed it away. He must have forgot because I never saw him again.

Another encounter that courted death with open arms happened in the same flat. I had been on a five-day smoking bender. Alone, at some point, I passed out. On waking some 12 hours later to a fresh sunny morning, I reached over to my pipe



which I'd freshly filled just prior to losing consciousness. Bad move. A good sleep had seen my tolerance levels drop accordingly. With one giant hit of the smouldering rocks, that welcome high-pitched peal - the sound of another successful hit - was replaced by alarm bells and a feeling that things were not right. Oh no, things were not right at all. I bypassed 'high' and kept going, blasting toward a dark, hellish nightmare that felt like the definite oncoming of death. The intense trajectory of the hit didn't level off as expected. My heart began pounding explosively into my brain. Within seconds of this uncontrollable lift-off - all the time pleading with God, "let me live and I promise to quit" - I had violently overdosed. The most indescribable and unpleasant experience of my life. Up until that point, anyway.

I came to, laid face-down on a pile of CDs scattered over the floor. It was dark. I'd been out cold for hours. Maybe a day. There was no way of knowing for sure.

Slowly pulling together details, I concluded that I'd just narrowly escaped death. Then I filled the pipe again and hoped there was no such thing as God because I'd just openly lied to the fella. By this point I was little more than a vapour of a human, the kind who made mothers pull their children closer when they passed in the street. It was as low as I had ever been. My coke dealer wouldn't even sell me drugs for fear of being instrumental in my death. So I switched from home-made freebase to street crack.

Grand Theft Audio - a band featuring Chris McCormack and Ritch Battersby had just formed and I'd beg for them to let me join as second vocalist and guitarist. Only to be flatly denied on account of my anti-social habits. It was at this point that I figured if I wasn't able to join someone else's band then I guess it was time to get clean and go it alone. I smashed my pipe and bought a bicycle.

#### **GIRLS ARE BETTER THAN BOYS**

Freshly smitten and with increasingly clear tunnel vision, the general theme of the album began leaning towards women and love. I now had a partner, not just another woman of my dallying ways. Soon she was pregnant. This alarming shift in priorities dictated my first real attempt at sobriety. Once my system gave up fighting the new regime, I began to enjoy it. I developed a level-headed method of recording that was new to me. I was tireless and fully aware. This was the point where we knew we were making something very good indeed. The session began biting new gears.

'Girls Are Better Than Boys' was from a jam session dating back to our first meeting as a three-piece. I figured an album like this needed a 'Nutbush City Limits'-type stomper to liven up its armoury. My blossoming love-life provided the joyous subject matter and the song simply wrote itself. It was an unapologetic harkening back to those halcyon days of Chinn & Chapman (renowned glam pop era songwriters).

This song was my attempt to recreate those silver-booted days of 1973, when The Sweet blockbusted the future into a murky council house living room in North East England to a cross-legged kid sat transfixed in front of the TV. His radar locked and the doors of his imagination slammed open. An essential piece of DNA was finally being installed forever. This was my real schooling.

## BR AIN SUGAR

Right at the beginning of the SG5 sessions – before a note had even been played – an introduction was to take place that would drastically change my world. Blads took me to meet a friend of his who owned a studio in which we were considering recording the SG5 demos. The studio owner would turn me onto a method of making freebase that would revolutionise my keen approach to the sport – yet almost kill me in the process.

Traditionally, crack is gently cooked in a spoon using a mixture of cocaine bicarbonate of soda and water. Turning to a brownish oil, this grease is collected and allowed to cool and harden. This process involves a lot of fiddling around with burned spoons, lighters and various ingredients not always instantly at hand. Not massively convenient for the urban crack smoker on the move, I'm sure you'll agree.

On this fateful morning at the studio, I was made aware of a 'cold wash'. This involves mixing cocaine in cold water, adding a splash of ammonia and producing rocks of a far more potent variety. At least twice as strong. When trying this out for the first time, I was asked whether I was "hardcore" in order to determine the heaviness of my administered hit. I considered myself to be confidently dedicated, as supported by Blads. I settled down to experience my first smoke of ammonia-washed freebase. It hit me like all the car crashes in which I'd ever been involved, all taking place at once. It lasted twice as long as the traditional euphoric rush. It was like hearing music for the first time. It was like my first kiss. It was everything I had been looking for in my pursuit of the ultimate high. This would be a very major part of my life for the next five years.

'Brain Sugar' is a song about a love affair with crack/freebase that would eventually ruin everything good in my life, rob me of years of hard work and fortified trust. And ultimately, take my family from me and leave me for dead. But if drugs were going to see that everything in my life was taken from me, then it'd be music that would see it all returned to its rightful owner.

## (Whatever Happened To) ROCK 'N' ROLL GIRLS

At the turn of the millennium in the UK, the very idea of rock 'n' roll was a tired one suggestive of drunken uncles dancing at weddings and pot-bellied stars of yesteryear vying for summer seasons in holiday camps. And quite rightly so. Rock 'n' roll had become an embarrassment. The musicians themselves tended to be locked into an eternally bescarved impression of Rod Stewart and their audience stuffily refused to stray from tradition. Neither party made the inglorious genre look remotely attractive.

I missed the girls though. The late 80s still clung onto a 1970s depiction of sex appeal: long-haired, leather-clad rock guys living a deliberate excessive hedonistic lifestyle. But it was the heavily-adorned, omnipresent rock 'n' roll girls that completed the fantasy for me. They were as much a part of the tapestry as the road crew and the audience. They might have represented a very specific faction of the big picture. Objectifying as it might seem today, I certainly don't remember anyone feeling degraded at the time. Not all rock 'n' roll girls wanted to have sex with



musicians – nor was there such an expectation. These girls just loved the music, adored the lifestyle and brightened up proceedings like stadium spotlights.

As clichéd as the history books might paint the time, I'm glad that I graduated from that era's rock training camp. I cherish every memory of my rock 'n' roll apprenticeship. Whether it's receiving a surprise blowjob from a cute stranger in a festival crowd (just because Ratt were playing and I said the guitarist looked like Joe Perry) to being treated like royalty at the homes of rich rock stars' wives desperate for a decent fuck. Rock 'n' roll was once a vice-laden, brightly-lit playground for young lads earning their stripes. I doubt that anything like it exists for bands starting out today. The rock star era has died along with the industry that promoted it, and we'll never see its like again. Like the death of socialism, not everything changes for the best.

### **MONKEY ZOO**

I used to get so sad leaving Japan. We all did. The flight home would be a morbid portal transporting sullen musicians back into black and white. Even the most hardened were not immune to it. Grown men were regularly seen to shed tears on leaving that magical place.

On one trip over there touring with Hellacopters, as we all sat together enjoying our farewell banquet, I decided that I wouldn't leave at all. I'd met a pretty American model. I had some money. Dammit, I was going to get an apartment and stay in Tokyo – at least until I had a good enough reason to return to England. I'd keep the bedsit I had in London and I'd be a two-apartment sporting hedonist. And why not? It was a time where I could live however I wanted. Such excesses seemed to go with the turf.

My tiny new flat – in the university and college district of Ekoda, Tokyo – was quickly decked out from floor to ceiling in motion-activated collectibles bought from a local toy shop. I cleaned that store out of cool stuff. From animated skeletons to singing heads – all snapping, chattering and dancing – my entrance into the abode would set off the whole menagerie into noisy motion. And I loved it.

I didn't speak much Japanese, the local bars and eateries spoke even less English, but for over eight months we never found communication to be a problem at all. One day on a regular phone call to back to home, I was told that a friend and mentor had killed himself. His name was Danny Deen. His artwork can still be seen on the likes of 'PHUQ' and related merchandise of that period. I was an unhappy kid from a broken home and he was the first adult who spoke to me with respect. He spotted talent in my playing and urged me forward where no one ever had. He even let me play my first ever gig in his post-punk outfit The Letters who were supporting The Fall. He'd sit for hours explaining to me how important it was to make jokes about everything. He asserted that no subject – no matter how unsavoury – should ever be considered taboo. I ate every word like the inspiration-starved sponge I was.

His house was always full of kids like me, eager to resist society's trappings. Angry young vessels, smashed on mushrooms and cheap booze, and primed for the intervention of his Zappa-like wisdom. We were small birds being fed by a pteranodon. He was our guru and friend. Even walking around the old town with him – breaking windows or climbing around remnants of homes left partially built by striking demolition firms – every day was an adventure as well as a rite of passage.

As we got older, Danny Deen and I would discuss suicide and depression at length. Subjects that most others were afraid to even broach let alone go into in detail, but we would investigate such topics with scrutiny and fascination. And it was okay. It was fascinating and we saw nothing wrong finding worth in that which others refused to accept and discuss. Like death, for example. Finding out that he had taken his own life – so suddenly yet perversely so expected – put paid to any soul-searching I was attempting to unearth in Asia. I was reduced to being a little kid again. I cried like I hadn't since teenage frustration made me hit my head repeatedly against brick walls. I just wanted to go home and see his body before they buried him. Even then his empty shell looked so lifelike it was more of a shock that he didn't leap out of the box and shout "Taa-Daaaah! Gotcha, ye cunt!"

It was another example where I just left the apartment I was staying – contents and all – and fled the country. I've had many friends die, but none of them took away as much as Danny Deen.

#### **INSIDE OUT**

This was an older song, written in a hotel room in Thailand while I was over there kickboxing. I remember being so proud of the lyrics at the time that I kept the hotel paper on which they were written in my pocket. Just in case a time should ever present itself where I'd feel inclined to retrieve and recite them..

Some time later, I found myself in a large open-plan stone room in a Thai jail housing over 50 prisoners. I was placed here after an incident following my inability to board a flight back to the UK which had been over-booked. The following flight wasn't due to leave until the following day. So I had almost 24 hours to kill.

Everyone I knew in Thailand worked in the hotel we'd been staying at in Pattaya. In good traffic it was some two hours away from the airport. Thai whiskey was very cheap and Valium was available over the counter at any pharmacy. Together they are a stone-cold guarantee of blackout drinking. As a result, I didn't make it back to the hotel as planned. Instead I found myself being dragged out of a bar after being involved in a bar fight. Then thrown into the back of a police van. The next day – in the holding cell – Thai authorities discovered that my visa ran out on the day of my intended exit (the day before). As such, I was transported to the Bangkok Hilton. Not – as one might assume – the name of a nice comfortable international hotel, but the ironic name of a renowned prison. Here I begin serving what looked like becoming an indefinite prison sentence until an intervention by the British embassy.

I was in the Thai chokey for almost two weeks before my friend, video director Philip Richardson ('Anthem', 'If Life Is Like A Lovebank...'), came to my rescue and occupied the British embassy in Thailand until he received a guarantee of my release. It was a move that proved to be blessedly successful. Rather more successful than the British envoy who'd previously been sent to check on my progress. His idea of easing my situation was to bring me a bag of fucking doughnuts. "You do know there's only one type of doughnut that anyone here is interested in, right?" I said. "And it's not fucking frosted".

It was true. Only days before his visit I had successfully made friends with an Iranian terrorist. After a few days he asked me to take a shower with him. "I love

"you?" he asked in broken, but very plain English. Time to make new prison buddies.

So I made a new friend: a frail-looking prisoner who showed me his ID photo. It had been taken just two years previously and pictured a man surely 20 years younger. Now grey and weak, the man in the photograph sported thick black hair and a stern expression. Leukaemia had swiftly robbed him of his looks. Not only that, but after a particularly extreme night of coughing, it took his life too. Waking up to silence, I realised I was sitting next to his corpse. Time to make new prison buddies.

I found a tall, rock 'n' roll-looking individual who ran the drugs racket and claimed he could procure a local mobile phone call in return for some of my silver jewellery. A trade I was more than happy to make. All seemed promising until the phone arrived and I called my friend at the hotel at which I'd been staying. We shared the same twisted sense of humour and laughed at the same tasteless jokes. On answering the call, they immediately assumed I was joking about my incarceration and promptly hung up. It appeared I was fucked.

I promised my Keith Richards-looking cellmate that if he could get me a long distance call to England, I'd bail him out as soon as I got back to the UK. I have no idea how he managed it, but the phone arrived and I made the call to my girlfriend of the time. The call went straight to her answering machine.

So there I was, performing for a room of terrorists, murderers, travellers, sick and mentally ill inmates, with this scrap of hotel paper in my hand. Singing 'Inside Out' with no musical accompaniment. It was the song's first public performance and it received a standing ovation.

I was awarded prison kudos for this performance and would go on to perform daily readings of poetry and diary entries. A huge, black, art-loving American inmate took pity in my plight. He took me under his large wing and offered me some horse tranquillisers the size of small frisbees. So I took them all. I had no idea how long I had been out cold for, but lying motionless on the stone floor had cut off all feeling in my right leg. An order to "stand up" echoed out of nowhere and I was unable to comply. I stood up, fell down, stood up again, fell down again. With a baton shoved under each arm and with legs trailing behind me, I was unceremoniously dragged from the prison cell. My only thought was, "So this is it? After all the close shaves with death in my life I'm finally going to be dragged to a room and simply shot?"

In the room I was taken to a small window. In the window was the friendly face of my good friend Philip Richardson, here to assure me of my freedom the next morning. As I sat in that room trying to regain consciousness from the powerful sleeping tablet still pulling me into slumber, I watched out of the window as a member of the kitchen staff walked across the courtyard with a huge pan of the filth on the menu for dinner that evening. As they tripped on the uneven surface, the pot went flying, spilling its inedible gunk all over the ground. The ruckus and odour immediately attracted the interest of the dozens of stray dogs that make up every square foot of Bangkok. The dogs curiously sniffed the slops, took a few tentative licks then turned up their noses and walked away. The pot carrier scooped the gruel back into the vessel and continued to the cells to feed the prisoners. I still don't know what they fed us but it says a lot when even starving dogs wouldn't eat it.

Once back home I kept my promise and paid to have my Rolling Stones-lookalike friend released from prison. His crime? Travelling without a passport. His time inside? Eight years, at the point where I met him. His next move? On being freed he continued to travel without a passport. Within a few weeks I received a letter from this friend – telling me he'd been arrested at the first border and sent straight back to jail.

### I WANNA BE NEW

Always a solid live favourite, the album version illustrates Jon and Blads to be a devastating rhythm section. It was with great sadness that I saw Andy Selway opt for the drum stool in the newly formed Yo-Yo's instead of sticking with Silver Ginger 5.

He'd go on to experience his own collection of dramas in that band, but replacing him would also prove to be more of a trial than I'd anticipated.

Once the album was finished, we were offered a Japanese tour. So on completion of recording it was up to me to find a live band. And fucking sharpish. Jon Poole stayed on bass duties and Sweden's Electric Boys frontman Conny Bloom was brought in on guitar – under the wise recommendation of Dante Bonutto. I'd recently signed a management deal with Sanctuary – helmed by Iron Maiden mastermind Rod Smallwood. As suggested by Rod's assistant Nick Mallinson, I called upon the services of Justin Greaves. The legendary Iron Monkey drummer and quite possibly the nicest fellow I'd met in that point in my life. He was the final piece, we had a band.

All seemed perfect until it came to actually rehearsing. Justin, whilst undoubtedly incredible at high speed drumming, was uncomfortable with the more pop-rock styling of my material. With only one album's worth of songs from which to draw a set list, choosing tracks wasn't an available option; we needed to play the entire album. So we needed to replace Justin. With only 48 hours before our plane left Heathrow.

Conny urgently got in touch with former Electric Boys drummer Thomas Bromann and with painfully little preparation, we were off to play our first show in Osaka. Matters weren't greatly improved the night before the first show when our new drummer was headbutted by our tour manager, Johnny Allen. It was simply a drunken fracas, but it still left our drummer unable to breathe properly for his first gig. Not ideal – especially in the sweltering heat of Osaka.

But then I wasn't helping our chances either by wearing of a pair of stack-heeled boots I'd had specially made. An ill-advised cocaine-inspired idea that placed my head mere inches from the boiling lighting rig of Osaka Club Quattro. It was our guitar tech – the legendary Nitebob – who eventually injected some common sense into proceedings. He sternly advised me to "lose the fucking shoes" at which point things began to take shape. Within a few shows we appeared to have ditched the curse that had seemingly been placed on the band. We quickly developed into a supernaturally tight unit and started to sound like the arena band we were sure to become. But of course the curse hadn't been completely lifted – merely shifted. It was still tagging along for the ride.



## CHURCH OF THE BROKEN HEARTED

The oldest song on the album with a chorus that pre-dated even The Wildhearts. Here was the chance to have this song finally realised as the gospel-driven rock monster it was intended to be. With three female singers cheekily drafted in from the nearby church, and the classical organ talents of Cardiacs keyboard player Bill Drake at hand, this was set to be the stadium-sized torch-song of the album.

I'd already sensed that this song had hit potential. Pete Winkelman had once, unforgettably, quoted it as being "the best song you will ever write". Something that no songwriter ever wants to hear. Still, while it had recently been turned down by Alan McGee for Creation Records, it was this chorus that originally persuaded EMI bosses to offer me a development deal after being fired from The Quireboys. And I still believed in it. So I made this song the bait with which to snag a Sanctuary management deal. The biggest rock management in UK, Sanctuary were currently employing the services of Steve McTaggart - ironically the Wildhearts' first ever manager. But Steve was currently gunning for Silver Ginger 5. With so many elements falling into place, it seemed like a planetary alignment was in full swing.

Maybe this is what it felt like when things were about to finally go right?

## TAKE IT ALL, WHY DON'TCHA?

The final song written for the album, designed to be the ultimate closer - complete with slow-burning intro and false endings galore. The album was completed, it sounded immense and we had Sanctuary management backing us. What in God's name could go wrong now? Sat in the spacious offices of Sanctuary management, dwarfed by the intimidating success of Iron Maiden advertised on every wall and flat surface of the building, I excitedly listened to the plans that this powerful company had in store for me. Sanctuary had now started up their own record company. Surely they would release the album worldwide - excluding Japan - and we'd begin our international takeover?

"I see it like this," said uber-manager Rod Smallwood, hand punctuating the air with each syllable. "Ginger And The Three Ringed Circus". I was confused. I wanted explosions, leather, danger.

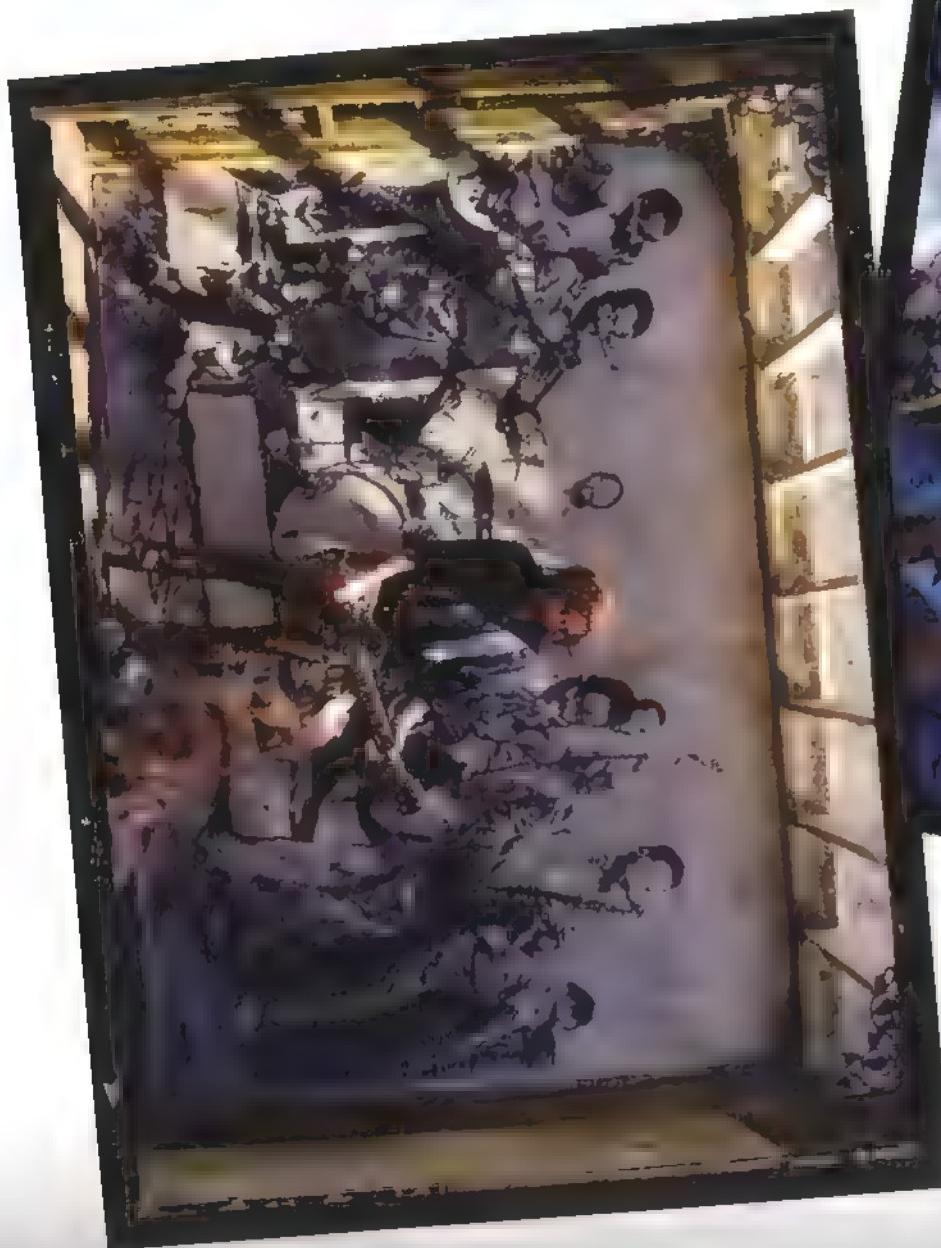
"Ginger, you're dressed as the circus ringmaster and the musicians are dressed as different circus performers...,"

I'm not sure exactly how much more description the plan went into. At this point I was deafened by a sickening dread. I wanted Rammstein; I wanted blood, I wanted destruction. My new management company wanted Spinal Tap. Hardly the start I'd hoped for.

"Can't we just release the album on Sanctuary and tour it?" I asked, my voice losing conviction with each emotive gesture that Mr. Smallwood's air-painted for his grand circus plan. "You have to understand, Ginger," he countered, "big wheels move slower."



But as my heart sank into the plush wall-to-wall carpet I was unable to buy the hard sell I was being given. To me, big wheels simply spelled big problems. As I returned to my flat and began sucking on the pipe again, not only were my dreams of rock 'n' roll redefined, but my idea of just how big a problem could get was also redefined. My problems were going to become fucking Olympian.



CHAPTER SIX B  
SILVER GINGER  
EXTRA TRACKS

5

## TOO MANY HIPPIES (IN THE GAERDEN OF LOVE)

Recorded as part of the 'Black Leather Mojo' sessions, this would appear as a bonus track on the Japanese version. A rowdy little number that sounded more like a 'Fishing For Luckies' cast-off than the sleek and streamlined rock monster I was aiming to create with this album. But as Mark Dearnley wisely said, "record everything".

As a side note, the theremin in the verse is, in fact, me doing an impression of a theremin. Because we couldn't locate a real theremin anywhere. I have since taken bets on this not being a fact. But since I can no longer make this noise, I have subsequently lost money. So you'll have to take my word for it.

## DOOGIE!

A song written for an aborted project/band called Eureka - intended to be a punk version of Black Grape. For which an album's worth of songs were written. The demo recording sessions took place with Ruts drummer Dave Ruffy and Wildhearts producer Mark Wallis. Recorded at Battery Studios in London, it largely involved loops and beats - the kind of thing far better suited to a home set-up than a lavish studio. Eventually studio costs piled up, my money ran out and the tracks were left unfinished. This was the only song that made it out of that entire collection.

## WALK LIKE A MOTHERFUCKER

By the time Sanctuary had looked high and low for a company to release the album - all the while sitting on their own label - a year had passed and they eventually gave up on 'Black Leather Mojo'. Don't worry, it made no sense to me either. A second album was then suggested. So with sparring partner Conny Bloom on board, we began writing and demoing new material - once again at Blackwing Studios. Blads would return to play drums on these songs, but the intention was to include Ritch Battersby in the new line-up - once he was contractually able to leave Grand Theft Audio.

While never becoming more than a demo, this song was nevertheless picked up by acclaimed Swedish video director (and former drummer of black metal pioneers Bathory), Jonas Åkerlund. Jonas was a good friend of Conny's and director of a new movie called Spun (2005). He wanted to use this song in the soundtrack. In this fantastic film - which ironically depicts the erratic lives of speed addicts - the song features in a hilarious scene where a girl is left helplessly strapped to a bed with this chorus skipping in the background - over and over again. In fact it replaced a Kiss song, if I'm not mistaken. This was the first time I'd ever heard my music in a movie, and the thrill was doubled as it was my favourite film of that year.

## MORE IS THE LAW

With Conny Bloom's impeccable rock credentials on our side, it made sense to plough that territory more thoroughly, so I aimed for a more mainstream heavy rock vein with our proposed second album. Intended as a hybrid of The Beastie Boys and Monster Magnet, I struggled to shake off comparisons to WASP unkindly levelled at the resulting mash-up. Sanctuary management were equally non-plussed by the

results, agreeing to tear up the contract between us. I think we all knew that our strongest shot at target was the debut album which had been casually squandered in favour of sitting around doing nothing. Ironically, stadium-sized rock tunes and all-in-one catsuits didn't become de rigueur for another few years until The Darkness took up the mantle.

#### LAST BASTARD IN HEAVEN

Although this was a hearty attempt at composing another modern rock anthem, it was hard to ignore calls for last orders on our peculiar brand of punk/glam/hard rock. After a string of ludicrously well-attended shows, we had successfully delivered every element of our manifesto. From flaming guitar-smashing to detonating enough pyrotechnics to set fire to the ceiling of Nottingham Rock City (a personal high point), we were eventually resigned to the fact we were superfluous to the needs of the zeitgeist. Dangerous theatrical presentation wasn't big on the world media agenda and with every costly concussion bomb we set off, there were ten requests for another Wildhearts album. The relentlessness of which made an even louder din.

I had tried as hard as was humanly possible to bring back some genuine danger and rock star antics to a greying genre that thirsted for tradition. But the world of trad rock was having none of it. Maybe our idea of explosions and rock bombast would have worked in a different era? Or maybe I'm just the only one who loves the idea of having my face tanned by fireballs and temporarily deafened by heavy riffs. I can't say that the world of entertainment makes an awful lot of sense to me.



CHAPTER SEVEN:  
THE SINGLES CLUB

Q: The Singles Club started with 'I'm A Lover Not A Fighter' in its first month. How long had the idea of a solo project like this been in your head? Did you write this first track specifically for the Singles Club or was it waiting to find an outlet to appear on?

A: I had originally written that song for Backyard Babies. It was part of a four-song demo from which they used only one song, 'Brand New Hate'. The other songs, 'And This Time I'm Serious' and 'You, Me & BT', were also recorded as part of the singles Club set. I'd planned for Oregon (Backyard Babies' lead guitarist) to sing this song because I loved his backing vocals. I was interested in hearing him take lead vocal duties. He later went on to sing lead vocals on many songs and sounded every bit as good as I'd hoped he would.

I think the idea for The Singles Club initially came from Dante Bonetti, my ex-A&R man from East/West. Dante was still a great supporter of mine at this point and remains a very close friend to this day. In fact it was him that suggested I write with Backyard Babies in the first place. I have a lot to thank Dante for and continue to be inspired by his insane work ethic and belief in music.

Anyway, once I was given the instructions to write, record and release three songs every month for a year, my fiery imagination was drenched in gasoline and I concentrated on little else. Actually that's technically untrue, I was an alcoholic heavily addicted to freebase - the maintenance of which also required its own level of concentration.

Q: The first B side of the Singles Club was 'Don't Let Me Die Lonely', except it wasn't originally destined to be a B-side. The mood of the lyrics indicates quite a blue, but also hopeful vibe to the song. Was there a change in your lifestyle between its composition and its release? If so, was that instrumental in making it secondary to the relatively up-beat opener of 'Lover'?

A: I'd written the song as a single man, but then I'd become involved in a relationship by the time of its recording and subsequent release. At first it was a whimsical love song. But with the advent of drug addiction, it became a more downbeat affair - as many songs did within the serotonin-depleted throes of a cocaine comedown.

Whilst entirely self-inflicted and therefore - in my opinion - undeserving of any pity whatsoever, drug withdrawal is just about the most miserable thing a person can endure.

I'd already experienced the renowned heroin withdrawal - known as cold turkey. Compared to a crack/freebase comedown, that infamously unpleasant purging felt like a massage with a happy ending.

Maybe it was the fact that I'd been suffering from depression for pretty much my entire life, but cocaine comedowns were brutal for me. The only thing that could drag my reality back from suicidal mania was pressing more cocaine with which to cook and smoke.

'In the void between running out of drugs and getting more, I tended to hunch over my guitar, pouring out misery like some kind of cleanse of toxins. It was in this state that I'd write most of the music that I released from 1997 to about 2004.'

Q: 'Thailand Über Alles' describes your time spent incarcerated in the infamous 'Bangkok Hilton' in Thailand. Were you inspired to write these lyrics during this time inside or were you more concerned about getting out in one piece before putting pen to paper again? How did the experience change your outlook on life as a songwriter? Have you ever had the desire to return to Thailand?

A: While in prison, I had no desire to write lyrics, but I did keep a diary of my daily thoughts and observations, which I would read to the large room of major and petty criminals on a nightly basis.

I didn't even know if I would get out, so writing stuff to record after my release was literally the last thing on my mind. I was concentrating more on survival skills and how to preserve my anal virginity.

However, once released, I wanted to write a book about my experiences. That was until a friend told me, "to be honest it's probably of no interest to anyone" (apparently an actor on the TV show Brookside had a similar run-in with the law and had been given similar advice). I kinda wish I had written the book now as I can't remember a lot of what happened in there. I would appear that being fresh from the experience there was enough in my story to fill a book.

Nonetheless I did put my feelings into the song 'Thailand Über Alles', which is the only fresh report of that fateful trip to Thailand. I didn't go back to Thailand because imprisonment comes with a lengthy ban from returning. I'm not sure if the ban has been lifted, and I have very little desire to find out.

I can't say that the experience had too much of an effect as far as writing goes. Although it did make me more careful for what I wish for. I'd been telling people for months that I'd never been to prison and believed I might come out of such an experience with some new found knowledge unavailable anywhere else. I was wrong about the knowledge, but dead right about getting what you wish for. In fact ordering stuff from the universe worked against me many times before I started actually using it in a beneficial manner - which I do now to great effect.



**Q:** 'Cars & Vaginas' came out with a heavy 'surf' vibe, also featuring a lot of sax appeal. What influenced you to adopt this particular style? Were you consciously arranging the Singles Club to stretch your sound past that of The Wildhearts?

**A:** Living in Los Angeles, the lifestyle of sunshine, beaches and scantily-clad ladies had imprinted itself into my songwriting DNA. The sun makes people horny and the last thing I want to compose when I'm horny is an angry song. An angry horny song, can you imagine it? You'd have to be a rapist-in-training to write an angry song on the beach.

Musically I was trying to get away from The Wildhearts style as much as my abilities would allow. I was still grounded in guitar music. I'd have liked to experiment further, but I simply lacked the skills. Still, you can take the boy out of the North East of England etc. I think that writing specifically about 'cars and vaginas' is a very northern England observation of the California dream. There always seems to be a lot going on over there for a place where nothing much ever actually happens. Apart from a very select few, in Los Angeles you either sunbathe, take drugs, or leave.

**Q:** 'You, Me & BT' was originally written for Backyard Babies about Nicke Borg's love of talking on the phone. Did you also have a personal connection to the subject matter of this song? Had you run up some large bills yourself in the past during your relationship with your Filipino girlfriend? You also mentioned that this song was done in one take. What was it about the song that made it so straightforward to play?

**A:** Ha ha, yeah, the Backyard Babies looked like they'd been born with conjoned telephones attached to sides of their heads. I thought it was hilarious as I've always hated using the phone. I still dislike talking on them but I detested them back then. I would often throw them from the window of my moving car. Luckily my Filipina girlfriend lived in London as I'm pretty certain I couldn't have dealt with a long-distance relationship back then if it meant being on the phone all day.

Nicke is a great guy and obviously very popular, so he'd run up the largest bills of the whole band, which were terrifying. The only thing I spent that kind of money on was my supply of narcotics.

This song was recorded pretty much live. That's because as a unit, Jon Cooke, original Wildhearts drummer Steve and myself were an incredibly tight and intuitive unit. We could run through a song in rehearsal once, and it would be locked in by the second pass. Those guys somehow knew where the pushes on the beat would be in my songs, and where to nail it on the one. We locked down verses instinctively and opened up choruses as if we were using the same brain.

For the singles Club, I wanted the freedom to be sloppy when it was warranted, but precise when called for. At the time I couldn't have picked more suitable players to realise that idea.

Q: The heavy riffs of the choruses to 'Not Bitter, Just A Little Disappointed' indicate a mood somewhat darker than just being disappointed! Was the intention of the song to be deliberately angry? Or did the anger develop as you became immersed in the lyrics and reminded of the song's original inspiration?

A: *Stijn and I have always been great fans of heavy riffs as well as punk rock. When I came into rehearsal with something musically dark, we were both naturals at making it darker and dirtier. It was like a mission. Putting songs together with Jon Poole was a joy. He'd come up with ridiculously melodic bass lines that would echo the lead vocal and showcase the heavier part. I mean, we were putting this whole thing together either hungover or drunk - or both - but the quality in playing never suffered. The sessions just got later and later.*

*In the eye of the storm of a drug hangover, my moods would fluctuate like a mosquito in a hurricane - often within the writing of one song. Such was the case with 'Not Bitter, Just A Little Disappointed'. I'd start in one place and it seemed perfectly natural to end up in a different sonic location altogether. Nowadays I try to stop myself doing this as much as I can - otherwise the songs become predictable. But in some cases it just feels entirely natural to flip the channels.*

Q: You wrote 'And This Time I'm Serious' for the Backyard Babies. Why was it never picked up by them? How do you balance the needs of a song for another artist with your own thoughts and writing process? Does this sometimes clash, resulting in songs that don't work for those other artists, but end up working well for you?

A: *'I don't know why they didn't pick it up. Maybe they didn't want to sing something that is kind of a ballad? A lot of energetic bands don't do ballads. Maybe they don't trust cruise control and would rather hammer the gas all the way - I understand that completely.'*

*For me, growing up in the north east of England, slower or more melodic songs were part of the social fabric and I've never had a problem with allowing this side of my upbringing into my writing style. I love a good song and I don't even require the tempo of something that I respond to.*

*I think it's largely down to this factor alone: I don't write for other artists. The odd time I've been given an assignment to write for someone else, I'm usually met with "this is too melodic" or "too poppy". Whatever the fuck that means. It's "too memorable"? I guess a lot of people think of me as a heavy rock songwriter and are disappointed in the results when I present something that I think has a nice chord structure or an interesting take on a phrase. I get the feeling people would prefer something that went "uuuurruggghhh." I usually suggest that for those types of songs they should not enlist the services of an actual songwriter.*

Q: 'Re-Inventing The Wheel' was written about a friend's close call with heroin addiction. In the single notes, it says that it was literally written hours before its first performance at The 12 Bar (which appeared on Grievous Acoustic Behaviour). During the time that passed between its first performance and its recording for the third single, had your friend's addiction improved to the point where the song didn't feel so emotional to play? Does it feel like you get a song back when the subject matter takes a turn for the better?

A. I don't remember it being written specifically about the person or their addiction. But I do remember it being written when every time the phone rang, I'd die a little inside. I didn't know whether it was the inevitable news that my friend had been found dead or just someone saying, "Hello".

'It's an awful situation to be in as anyone who has been in a similar predicament can testify. Everyone had to be there for this person because if we'd given up on them, they might have reacted badly and doubled their dose. But it was drawn and ultimately heartbreaking - not to mention really fucking unfair - to see everyone in such discomfort and confusion at all times.'

Eventually the person burned so many bridges that people had no choice but to move on. But like most addicts that stay addicted, there's someone in there that people used to love dearly, and it's natural to cling onto that love and hope for a miracle. Sadly there are only four ways to go with heroin, you quit, you die, you get jailed or you simply disappear. They took the fourth option.

Q: How long did it take to find your preferred way of taking absinthe? And at what point did you realise you had to pen 'Blinded By Absinthe' to describe the effects of this particular drink? Considering its effects, why has absinthe stayed relatively under the radar from the authorities, remaining a relatively legal intoxicant?

A. As soon as I decided that cocaine wasn't strong enough (prompting me to mix it with ammonia and smoke it), I also decided that Jack Daniel's wasn't even having any effect on me any more. One day I discovered Hapibug Absinthe in a little liquor shop near Kentish Town in London.

It was 89.9% proof - way beyond anything legally available. I still have no idea how this shop managed to bypass the liquor guidelines or if it was simply a brazen middle finger to the law. Nor did I care. They'd order me in the stronger red label bottle especially with, at my worst, it got to be a daily transaction.

The first time I tried over-proof absinthe (not the 40% stuff you get in wine bars), I simply mixed it with water and that was how I always drank it. I'd enjoy seeing people try to take a cocky swig straight from the bottle and throw up instantly, fucking arseholes. The trick was to keep the stuff down. A half 'n' half blend of absinthe and water meant that I could drink a bottle of the stuff at the height of my debauchery.

I didn't sober up from it for about three years and only really felt a proper absinthe hangover once when I ran out of it at a recording studio. I got so sick I had to drive back to London to buy some more.

I had no idea of the levels of intoxication I was regularly maintaining until I saw a video of myself trying to tell a joke and I couldn't understand a word that was coming out of my mouth. Well, that and the piss test I mention elsewhere in the book. My liver was so ruined that I was passing the colour of dark chocolate.

When I say I'm amazed I made it through alive, it isn't a boast of any kind, I'm just genuinely confused as to why it didn't kill me – to which all the signs pointed. But still, in all my years of addiction, I didn't steal, I continued to work and no-one was worried about me. I absolutely seemed fine and, to be honest, I felt okay too.

**Q:** In "The Saga Of Me And You", you sing, "I don't want to change a thing, I like the way I am." What does the 2015 Ginger make of the 2002 Ginger singing this line? How has your relationship advice changed in this time?

A. The song was about an absolutely stunning girl I used to know. Once we were an item, she rubbed me up the wrong way in every manner conceivable. I used to look at her sleeping naked and really couldn't believe that I wasn't attracted to her at all. She was physically perfect in an identikit media version of perfection. I've since realised that the way a person looks has very little to do with attraction and the longevity of a relationship. Which is obviously down to the chemistry you both share. And once that chemistry is in place, then your partner becomes the most beautiful person in the world – in every way.

I now feel pretty stupid that I used to put so much importance on physical attributes and I'm ashamed to say that I considered girlfriends to be trophies of sorts. I never quite understood how I could still feel lonely in a relationship.

Still better late than never, eh? Now I have a partner who improves every single element of my life – from my friendship with others to my relationship with myself. I guess I was a late bloomer as far as love goes. Like everything else in my past, I've tried to escape reality instead of seeing it for its true value, namely the best place in the world to be if you do it right.



Q: The sleeve notes for 'Naked Innocence' describe being rewarded with ultimately fewer - but truer - friends as your life progresses and as the search for like-minded souls reaches its conclusion. How do you feel about the advent of social electronic media, such as Facebook - with its attendant peer pressure to "collect" as many virtual friends as possible - in relation to this song? Does this view fit with a world that is much different from when the song was written? How do you feel your friendship with your fans has matured over the same period?

A: Oh man, those words have never rang truer than right now - in regards to both friends and fans. Only this time, I have proof! A relatively small group of fans saved my life and my career with the pledge campaign '555%' album and I feel closer to them than they will ever truly know. I will make it my life's mission to prove my gratitude to them.

The same goes for my friends. I've had to lose people along the way to make a valuable set of friends that I can trust and who will respect my other friends. These days, if someone even appears to be untrustworthy, or has a judgmental fibre in their person, they're out and they're dead to me. I choose my friends very carefully because I value my friends greatly. And I've got pretty good at spotting the vultures, the bullies and the emotional leeches before they have a chance to do any damage.

Q: You seem to have a great ear for female backing vocals, as captured in 'A Better Man', but you never really incorporated them much in The Wildhearts after 'Loveshit'. Was this a conscious decision that you wished to address when you started to record solo?

A: I grew up listening to male and female voices together - whether it was ABBA, The Rocky Horror Picture Show or Grease - and I've always loved the magic that a great blend can make. Probably more so than any purely male equivalent if I'm being perfectly honest.

With The Wildhearts I didn't want to record anything we couldn't reproduce onstage, so female backing vocals were out. But with my solo material and subsequent post-Wildhearts projects, it's been the one separating factor that makes it so special for me. But it's less popular for fans who want a more macho take on rock 'n' roll. Nothing much I can do about that. You want macho? Listen to metal. I'm a musician and the female voice is an instrument that I adore and cherish like a life-enhancing element. I can't imagine making another album without female vocals on it.

Q: Did you hope the Singles Club songs would gain more exposure than it did? For example, could 'Virtual Love' been a more commercially successful single with them? Were you frustrated that these songs - some of which describe some personal experiences of yours - didn't receive a wider audience? Did Infernal financially promote the Singles Club or was this never the aim of the project?

Some people are fine being sidemen and good for them: the world needs great team players that are happy to just make the team stronger. I value those people very highly. But it just isn't me. I had opinions before I had experience and now that I have over two decades in the business, I have very valid suggestions on how things should be done. This is my life too, so if I see something potentially damaging or simply a waste of time and money, I can't bring myself to play ball.

Nowadays, if I think something has potential, I'll put my own cash on the table and promote it like a motherfucker, whatever the outcome. It's all a learning curve and a gamble. I have no fear of taking risks, which is something I've failed to see in everyone I've worked with.

Most people are scared to take chances - which is fine if you don't mind settling for exactly what you have - but I can't work with those people. If you're not on the front line then you ain't on my team. I want to feel like I'm part of a fucking army, albeit one that is smart enough to know a stupid idea from a great one.

Still, every now and again I want to see a stupid idea through as well! And for that I need to be in tune with people I work with on that level too.

I demand honesty, balls, determination and a sense of the ridiculous. Give me that and we're going to get on just fine.

Q: As the Singles Club progressed, did your love of Jon Poole's bass playing prowess grow? Or did you realise his skills from the outset? Speaking of love, he lays the opening bass riffs of 'Energetic O', a song about another sort of love - how did the lyrics to this song... ahem... come to you?

A: Every time I work with Jon Poole I develop another level of love and respect for him - which began with his incredible bass playing. As far as I'm concerned, no one in the world comes close to him for musical understanding and sheer ability. There have been more times than I can count that I've seen seasoned professional musicians reduced to stunned silence by his playing



With regards to the sensitive subject matter of the song (i.e. masturbation), I have no problem writing about any and all subjects that drift into my radar. Working is no exception. 'Gross' being brought up as a Sparks fan encouraged me to explore topics outside of the typical boy-meets-girl dynamic and personal politics. It's worth delving into more darkened corners and unearthing things that people seldom discuss over a pint. The fact that these subjects make some people uncomfortable only delights me more. Those people are usually the types of people that avoid discomfort of any kind but I'm more than happy to deliver a jazzy slice of reality directly to their door.

Q: 'Where Did Everyone Go?' was apparently an abandoned track from 'Earth vs The Wildhearts'. What made you revisit it for the fifth single and how much did it change in style between its original incarnation and the version we ended up holding in our hands in 2002?

A: The original version of this was a blues-based number. I'd been using it as chord practice for years before The Wildhearts attempted to record it. The fact that I heard it as a smoky, laid-back shuffle played with brushes on a snare drum ruled it out as the band attacked it like a bunch of road menders digging through diamond. I think the decision to record it for the singles club was a drunken one. As was the decision to rock it up halfway through the song. Hey, most of the decisions for this collection were drunken ones, truth be known. Carlsberg special. Brew: one hell of a drink.

Q: The last three songs - starting with 'T.W.A.T.' - didn't make it onto a single of their own. Instead, they appeared on the combined release of 'A Break In The Weather'. At what point did it become clear that the project wasn't going to be completed as you'd hoped? Did you have a sixth single layout planned with more Dave Heulen artwork, or was the decision made before this?

A: We were working from one month to the next, with Dave Heulen coming up with art based on whatever we'd just recorded. We knew by the second week of the sixth month that the project was in jeopardy. No studio time was booked and no instructions for the artwork were in place. I could tell it wasn't so much a hunch in schedule as the label pulling out of the project. The fact that people had paid upfront for a complete collection rankled me more than any missed opportunities. Although I did have a number of songs on the back burner, I dismissed and buried them all in sheer disgust on finding that the project had been cancelled in such an underhand manner. Although the decision was completely out of my hands, the subsequent guilt followed me until 2014 when we relaunched our own singles club as part of the C.A.S.S project. We completed it in full with our pride intact.

**Q:** 'He's A Man' covers some pretty dark subject matter. Was there any personal connection to this song that made it more difficult to describe your disgust of men who would assault a woman? Do you see this particular style of songwriting as a useful outlet to vent about some of the darker elements of the human condition?

**A:** I was brought up as a child in an environment of very heavy domestic abuse. I regularly witnessed my mother being beaten by her second husband (as mentioned in 'Do The Lonely Suffer More, Or Less, Or Just The Same At The Point Of Death', from the '55%' album). I've been staunchly against any form of spacial abuse ever since and have ditched many friends for slapping their girlfriends. It's something I won't condone under any circumstances.

I can't even appreciate the work of Charles Bukowski because he was a well-known woman abuser. I don't understand anyone who can separate the artist from his failings as a human being - Hitler was apparently a decent painter, but you don't see anyone quoting him lovingly in pictures of him looking wittful and wise, do you? But people are okay with Bukowski hitting women? I just smell bullshit.

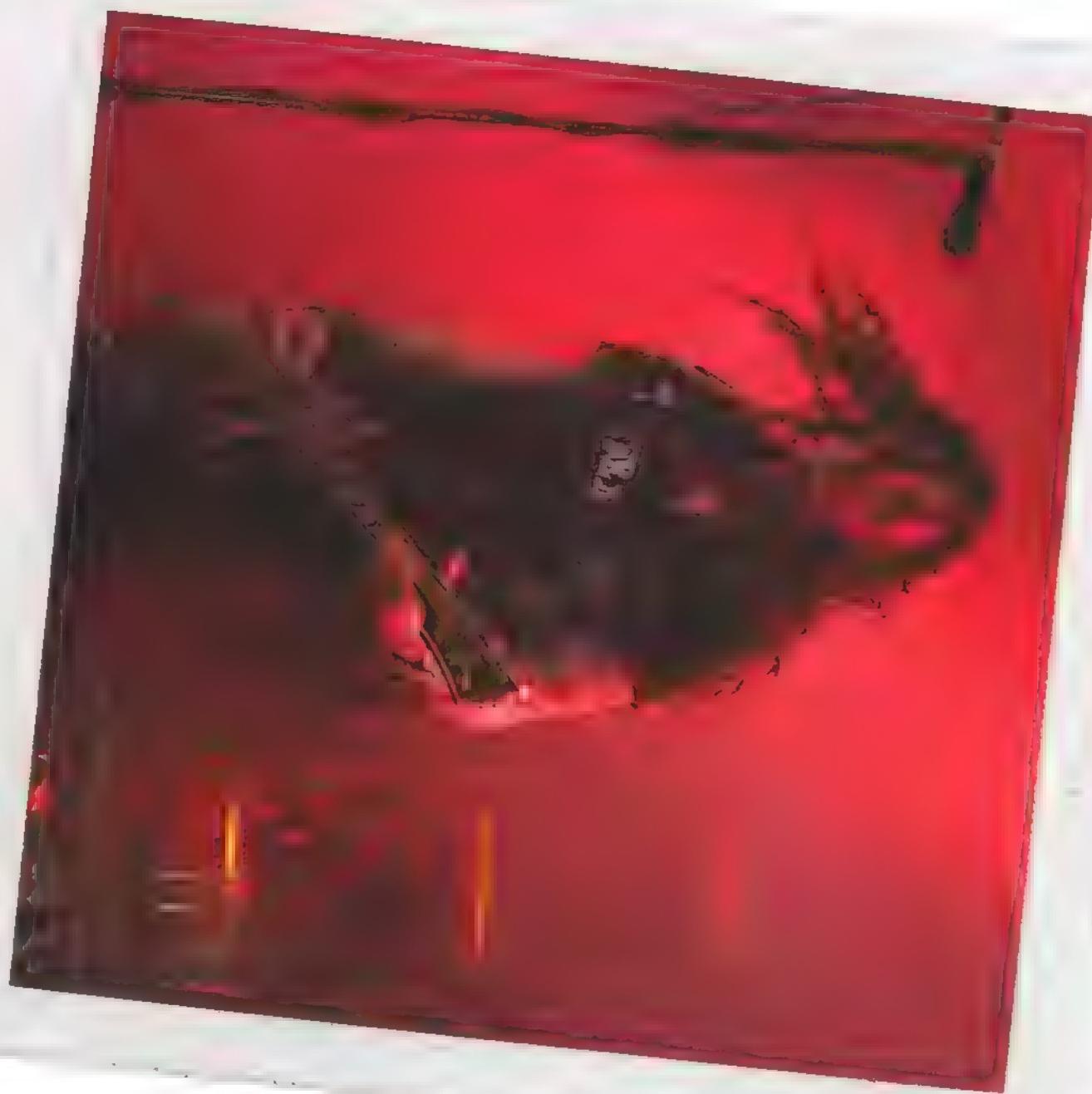
Someone could argue that hitting women isn't in the same league as killing millions of men, women and children. And they'd be a fucking idiot. The truth is, if you allow any criminal element to be worshipped whatsoever, then you're condoning that activity by proxy.

've seen my mother being repeatedly beaten and have cigarettes stubbed into her flesh whilst the police were unable to do a thing about it under the domestic laws of the time. If that happened to you, I guarantee you'd include violence against women a crime as heinous as murder.

**Q:** The final song of the Singles Club was 'The Dying Art Of The Chorus', recorded with Napalm Death's Barney Greenway and Sigur Sigur Sputnik's Neil X. How did this particular collaboration come about? Did you know this would be the final song of the project? Did you decide then that you would later repeat the Singles Club in the much more successful G-A-S-S project?

**A:** Far from feeling like the final song of the project, I felt that we were just getting warmed up. We were ready to take on styles that were alien and - quite frankly - a little intimidating to us. When Barney Greenway agrees to sing on something that could have been a *Sigur Sigur Sputnik* track, conquering dance music suddenly becomes less scary a proposition, you know?

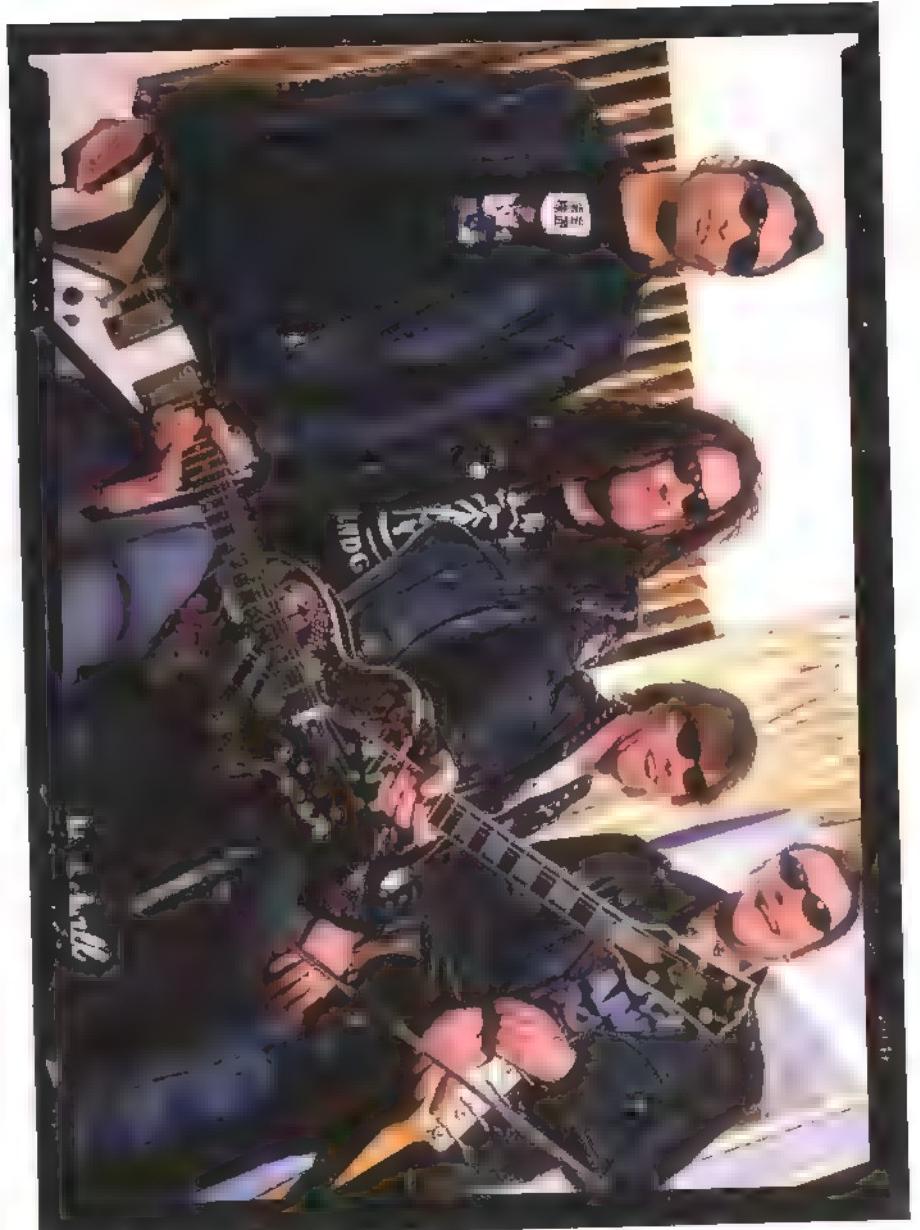
I have no idea where we would have taken the singles club in terms of exploring genres. But I will say that as a musician, I was more able to tackle differing styles of music with G-A-S-S than I was ten years earlier. Plus it was done completely independently of corporate backing and succeeded with flying colours - to the delight of all involved, including the fans. Which was a huge relief. That old adage of "if you want something done, do it yourself" - you'd better fucking believe it!



CHAPTER EIGHT  
RIFF AFTER RIFF AFTER  
MOTHERFUCKING RIFF



Where I will reform  
The Wildhearts,  
take up absinthe  
and crystal meth,  
miss out on  
winning £100,000,  
prove unfit for  
life insurance,  
and find Elvis.



## LET'S GO

I'd tried the commercial route: playing ball and listening to the experts. But I was given nothing but an empty feeling of compromise in return. I was angry and I was an addict. I wanted something to do. Something that was closer to my situation and state of mind. So I reformed The Wildhearts. I might as well have considered a tattoo of "be careful what you wish for" across my forehead. It wouldn't be for the last time.

Playing acoustic shows to fund a house, family and drug habit wasn't a dependable long term plan I could trust. So I was powerless to resist public demand when an offer came in to put The Wildhearts back together for some Japanese shows.

The only problem I could see was leaving my drug habit behind in UK; I certainly wasn't going to carry anything from country to country inside my arse. I'd never reached that level of desperation and happily accepted withdrawal as an alternative. Seriously, I'd seen people put turds in their freezer, anally insert drugs then shove the shit back inside themselves. Even at my worst that seemed a little excessive.

But a junkie is a tenacious beast and pretty soon I had a Tokyo connection for what they called ice. I'd tried something in Manila called Shabs - which I was told was the same thing - a smokeable form of speed. A kind of turbo crystal meth. Very moreish and, while not as strong as ammonia-based crack, it was at least something to keep the devil from the door. Or, more to the point, the pillow away from my head.

For five days I stayed awake smoking these crystal flakes. I was even trying desperately to finish my stash on the bus back to the airport, but this stuff just wouldn't fuck off. It just kept coming back as crystals inside my pipe. It turned out that what I thought was about £500 worth was more like \$5,000 worth. Hey, what's a zero between a mathematically challenged addict and dealer? Eventually I found myself snorting the remaining contents in a toilet cubicle in Narita airport, with an

assistant from the Japanese agency banging on the door to tell me that I was about to miss my flight. At this point I'm not sure I even needed an airplane to fly home.

I'd become involved with Napalm Death manager Rudy Reed through a random support slot at an Astoria show when I'd hastily assembled a metal band called Ginger's Angry Youth (named purely to use the huge neon G.A.Y sign on the wall for the club afterwards and to annoy any homophobes in the crowd). Rudy had been a friendly and familiar face since the Pete Winkelman days, so it made perfect sense to rope him in as the new manager of The Wildhearts. Which was the freshly-reunited 'Earth vs' line up. Although this line-up would prove to be anything 'but fresh'.

The emotional and psychological baggage that came with the members far outweighed the amps and cabs. Mainly because no one actually had any amps or cabs left. Or even, in some cases, guitars. All gear appeared to have been sold in the interim to sustain the personal lifestyles of the band members. As beginnings go, it was a shaky one at best.

A sour atmosphere was powerfully evident from very first band meeting. The toxicity of our collective personalities grew more noxious with every putrid and wearisome day that we dragged ourselves through. Whenever arguments would arise - always centred around money - I'd just fill my head with another gust of sweet smoke and be past caring. To every intent, The Wildhearts were little more than a headless leader and a dysfunctional backing band. This was the classic line-up that people had been asking for, yet nothing was registering as classic to me. Just a pale version of something we used to be. Then someone said, "let's put them in a studio".

#### PUTTING IT ON

I was determined to include the band in the writing process this time around and eventually managed to drag a few ideas out of unwilling participants. A very rough rhyming couplet from Danny here and a verse from CJ there. We had enough ideas to glue together and call it a song. But my biggest fear when writing with the band



was always lyrics. One person's idea of a clever turn of phrase could sit with me like a cliché that my tongue refused to allow out of the gate. The fact that it was me who would be singing it gave me power of veto – but not without pointless bickering about words, lines and meaningless specifics. Still, once the sparse ingredients (like those presented in 'Putting It On') were tacked up to sound like a cookie-cutter Wildhearts track (complete with heavy riff, chuggy verse, open chorus, yawn) this became something of a fan favourite. I sadly noted that the task of impressing people this time around wasn't too taxing.

To be honest I think this song shares the porcelain throne with the worst things we ever recorded. An absolute bag of nonsensical trivia. Anyone digging deeper than the surface would discover that it was insignificant at best. Luckily – for us at least – not many people did. Most seemed happy that we looked good in pictures. Not putting it on? I couldn't picture a more blatantly pretentious band. Yet I was the one stitching the material together just hoping no-one would notice the loose ends.

#### **LOOKING FOR THE ONE**

My relationship with Angie had moved on in terms of living conditions, but remained emotionally stunted throughout. We were a rock 'n' roll couple living in a rock 'n' roll house. Guests, late night parties and regular cocaine use was rife within our walls. The ever-present, ever-distorting hangover never seemed to slacken off long enough to clear the air. The difference was that I was smoking coke while others were snorting it. While essentially being the same drug – with presumably the same legal penalties – mine was the greater crime. In fact I'm not entirely sure that ammonia possession is technically a crime, but my use of it was frowned upon from a great height. Not that its stigma stopped most people from trying it.

Still, it seemed obvious to me that Angie had backed the wrong horse when expecting me to adapt to fatherhood the way that other kids' daddies slotted into the mould. I just wasn't, nor was I ever likely to be, typical.

When people wallow in what someone isn't, rather than immersing themselves in what someone is, conversations are words away from being arguments. And ours always were. Sullen silences were a more attractive option than all-out confrontation. We were both fiery characters and backing down was rare and painful for both of us. I was dreaming in borrowed comfort. Anticipating the day when my clothes would be waiting for me on the lawn. All the time drinking the dread to sleep.

This song was written from Angie's point of view and further illustrates the confusion in my life and even my writing style. I awkwardly sewed together as many unnatural musical segments as my false moxie would allow. In fact I think I got away with inappropriately mixing up genres simply because no-one would tell me that I couldn't. Or, more to the point, that I shouldn't do it because it sounded stupid. It was the audio equivalent of putting all your favourite food in your mouth at the same time and trying to figure out what the fuck the taste is.

**O.C.D.**

I was massively impressed by the amount of time and effort CJ put into 'O.C.D.' He collected as many Wildhearts-esque riffs as humanly possible and presented them as an almost finished song. I hoped it would spur on the rest of the guys to take the songwriting a little more seriously. It didn't.

I added a bozo chorus (liberally abducted from Toadies' 'Plane Crash' and Rocket From The Crypt's 'Born In '69'), stuck in a standard verse and helped tidy up the bridges, but the song remains pretty true to CJ's original demo. I've always enjoyed playing this one live. I'd demand that the swarthy old toad come up with more monsters like this should we ever make another album. Which, to be honest, I dearly hope we don't. The trouble with making a Wildhearts album (as we would find in abundance with the making of 'BARAAMB') is in the negative drama that lives within the very marrow of the band. It's almost like things weren't supposed to run smoothly for The Wildhearts, so we merely expedited the inevitable. Or maybe we just didn't get along? It could be that simple.

On paper – away from the wreckage – getting back together to make new music sounded like a bumper pack of good questionable fun. But after recording eight concrete examples of history repeating itself, stubborn logic dictated that this band is a curiosity best kept in a glass tank of formaldehyde. Like a cow sliced in two.

**BETTER THAN CABLE**

Written about my son after his aunt brilliantly remarked on his entertaining antics: "Aww Jake, you're better than cable!" More captivating than subscription TV. A new song was instantly 'born'. With The Wildhearts there always seemed to be complications between having a good idea and putting that good idea into practice. It seemed almost traditional. And now we could lovingly craft this tradition into an art form, with both band and organisation sharing the same confusion. Often with quite breath-taking results.

Exhibit one: the late, extremely great journalist and punk poet Steven Wells (a.k.a Swells/Susan Wells/Seething Wells) had recently been made singles editor for Metal Hammer magazine. Swells (as he was mostly known) loved The Wildhearts. Like us, he enjoyed causing a bit of good old fashioned trouble – whenever appropriate – or indeed otherwise. Hearing that we were back in the studio he decided to dedicate that month's Metal Hammer singles review spread entirely to us. The Wildhearts were going to be the singles page for that month. Each song we recorded would enjoy its own placing as a song review in itself, while the lead track 'Vanilla Radio' occupied top spot, surveying all around. It was to be a return fit for kings. Successfully negotiating magazine space, all we needed was to furnish him with a CD-R of all six new songs. The spread was ours. It was in the bag. What could go wrong? Unfortunately, on receipt of the disc, not only was the lead song missing, but so were four of the other songs. Only a muffled version of 'Better Than Cable' actually made it onto the disc. Our grand return was to be based around a very long review of a fucking B-side.

With the flag of defeat once again flapping wildly, Swells attempted to salvage something appropriating the prodigal return of rock behemoths The Wildhearts. In

truth we'd already blown our entrance, tripped over the loose carpet, knocked the drinks table over and vomited on the host. Exposing us as the clownish frauds we most genuinely were, I just hoped that the public wouldn't notice. But the shame was already pulling against my neck. And we hadn't even left the fucking studio.

### VANILLA RADIO

The song that spring boarded the group back into the public eye – largely due to a video featuring a dwarf Elvis and our amazing audience. In an inspired bit of casting by the ever-reliable team of Philip Richardson and Sue Pocklington, the main character of the video – a mini Elvis – was a hit with all who came into contact with him. Mainly down to the fact that he was usually wasted and enjoyed jumping from tables into the arms of anyone assuming he'd weigh the same as a small child. He didn't. The resulting carnage caused by this 14-stone miniature mass was admittedly hilarious and brilliantly messy.

The advertising campaign would be a less jovial but no less messy affair. Full page ads were taken out in all major rock publications showing a gloriously eye-catching shot from the video: the band rocking in line with guitars shimmering in the sun. It looked great. The problem was that these very expensive adverts all featured the wrong date, pitching its day of release a month earlier than the adverts actually appeared. In confusion everyone figured the single had already come out, so no one bothered to buy it. We had a hit video and a single that sold nothing.

As victorious as the video was in shoving The Wildhearts back into people's living rooms, it would also become the soundtrack to my mental breakdown. This attack would lead to a week's intense supervision in a Harley Street hospital, followed by an attempted suicide and the threat of sectioning in a psychiatric facility in Archway, London. This dramatic meltdown would take place whilst working on the next album – the aptly-titled 'The Wildhearts Must Be Destroyed' – during the re-recording of this song. I'll describe that in greater detail in the next chapter. As such, it's difficult for me to think of this track without the resulting mental fallout.

At the time there were merely faint signs that the reformation was faulty. Its weight was loaded onto a foundation that was built with bad blood and unresolved issues. The persistent spectres of the past followed us like paranormal hooligans just waiting to stick the boot in.

### STORMY IN THE NORTH, KARMA IN THE SOUTH

After the success of the 'Vanilla Radio' video, there was no lack of love for this scrappy band of wastrels as we clogged up *Kerrang!*'s new TV station with requests for "the video with the little Elvis in". But public support wasn't translating into cash. As a band, we were broke. In relative desperation, a week before the release of second single 'Stormy In The North, Karma In The South', I had entered a local bookmakers to ask for odds on this song making the top 20.

The bookie, tickled by this most unlikely of bets, offered me 1000/1, based on the fact that he'd never heard of the band. We hadn't even been aired on terrestrial radio since reforming. Perhaps the disaster of the 'Vanilla Radio' single could prove

profitable after all?

Rushing back to the studio, I urged our management to slam £100 on the deal, confident that our fans would come to our aid. They would lift the new release skyward and raise some much-needed funds. Management refused to honour the gamble, not trusting my conviction – even after the Lottery close shave back in the ‘Endless Nameless’ era. They didn’t believe we would enter the top 20. With sickening déjà vu, we listened to the chart run-down together, our hearts slowly being siphoned of joy as the single casually sauntered in at number 14. We’d have been sitting on £100,000.

The video would also be released as a chart-eligible DVD single – set to include a making-of featurette as a bonus item. However, as it transpired, the disc ended up being manufactured without the actual video of the single – which disqualified the release from chart eligibility. The release featured the bonus content only, with no actual music. Thank you detail-orientated management. I swear I’m not making this up.

I dearly loved our manager but this was the same guy that turned down the chance to invest in a mini-album for a band I’d recently alerted him to. They were called The Darkness. His reasoning was that “he just didn’t hear it”. No one heard it, people hated them, but I saw only gold bars with each note they played. It’s impossible to calculate just how much money this mini-album would have made during the heyday of this new UK rock phenomenon. Millions probably. I steadfastly refuse to acknowledge the loss, just as with the chart entry before it and the Lottery rollover before that. It made it clear to me that I was never going to get rich from music, gambling or winning the lottery. Like most people I would just have to work hard for every penny I was ever going to make.

### BANG!

Somehow, in all this confusion, our manager had been introduced to The Strokes’ producer Gordon Raphael. So we were brought together to record a few more tracks at a place called Albert Studios in London. A sweet, gentle and very funny New Yorker, Raphael had patiently never worked with a hard rock band before. In fact he had surprisingly little actual recording skills of which to speak, considering his success. His recording approach favoured smoking the band’s pot and talking on the phone outside. This left me to busy myself at the helm, which suited me fine. I had more studio experience than most. Including Gordon Raphael.

Besides, this particular brand of grandiose pop rock was something we could knock out in our sleep. Anyone getting involved would have simply complicated the process. With hindsight, I still can’t figure out why we ever paid for producers to attend recording sessions. All they did was basically agree or disagree with me. And I’d inevitably win. To all intents and purposes, I was producing the band. I was just giving my fee to the other guy.

One of the best loved B-sides I’d ever write, I do confess to having a real soft spot for this one. It’s a sweet melody that sits nicely with Gordon Raphael’s mix.

His approach was less orthodox than those we usually experienced with heavy metal mixing engineers. While I wasn't impressed with his level of involvement in recording, I was very fond of Raphael's unorthodox mixing style. Anyone who could make us sound fresh - in any way - was a winner in my books.

#### IF I DECIDE

While at this point I was nowhere near the height of my cocaine use, I'd still stay awake for days writing songs on auto pilot. Listening back to this one now, I honestly can't fathom what I was on about.

My family had a live-in nanny (or 'Yaya', a Filipino tradition) so my duties around the house basically amounted to washing myself and occasionally eating something. Otherwise I'd be locked in my tiny studio, writing by day and blowing crack smoke out of the window by night. I'd control the spasms with Valium and maintain a steady intake designed to keep me going without hitting the red.

By this stage I had started to drink absinthe quite heavily. On a regular day I was downing the best part of a bottle of Habsburg 89.9% proof. I had recently attended a doctor's appointment to obtain life insurance. I was refused without any reason - although I gathered they're not legally allowed to divulge such information. When pushed on the point, the doctor's secretary simply handed me a piss chart. The lightest colour being normal, the darkest being in need of urgent medical assistance.

My piss was darker than the darkest shade of piss on the chart by quite some margin. I was almost pissing black. I think if I'd actually known how sick I was, I'd have been a lot closer to death. Technically, I was as close as a living person could be. As it stood, I could always shake a hangover and continue drinking. Even as I saw friends dying around me, I continued to live on in denial. I was so unhappy with my life that I'd say it was more oblivious auto-destruction than actual denial. I really didn't care about the outcome of my lifestyle - either way I had no intention of quitting. The reality of my situation scared me more than my mortality and there seemed nothing I could do about it.

Listening to this song to remind myself how it goes, it makes absolutely no sense to me. The arrangement is a mess of unfamiliar and conflicting ideas. The lyrics paint a picture of a life alien to me now. I would hazard a guess that I was beginning to experience the developing stages of severe bipolarity, although this wouldn't be properly diagnosed for some time to come.

#### YOU'VE GOT TO GET THROUGH WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO GO THROUGH WHAT YOU WANT, BUT YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO GET THROUGH WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO GO THROUGH

With an intro from Stidi and a verse from CJ, this was an attempt to put something together that drifted from our formula. Quite successfully, I might add. Without wanting to repeat myself more than necessary to labour a point, I truly believe that if the band had learned how to work together, we'd have made a great team.

Mixing industrial elements with a Faith No More style chant made for a delightfully off-kilter chorus. An utterly manic riff drilled the whole thing home. This still stands

as one of my favourite Wildhearts B sides.

I had always longed for a Wildhearts inclusion in the Guinness Book Of World Records, an accolade which I probably only associate with because of my age group: with perhaps the longest song title ever, maybe we stood a chance.

The request was met with the standard lack of enthusiasm from the band and management.

Without a deal we were acting as an entirely independent unit. Nowadays I adopt the same DIY work ethic and scratch my head furiously at the chances we neglected to take and the opportunities we ignored. An independent band living within the comfort zone of predictable expectations? It's an effrontery to a history of artists that have carved out fresh niches for a brighter future. Our lack of ambition back then still makes me feel nauseous. The Wildhearts Mk II carved out nothing but holes in our arms. Selfish, self-centred and riddled with fear, we had an insular life that reaped puny benefits as a result. It wouldn't have taken a genius to see the approaching end. Fortunately there wasn't anything like a genius in our ranks.

#### MOVE ON

With a clear lyrical narrative – very unusual for me at the time – this song takes a rare peek outside of my stormy personal life. Or is it that of my already steadily crumbling band? Perhaps this was a hint at an active survival instinct of mine. The one that had clawed its way this far through life. Or perhaps I was just too stubborn to die? The fact is that I'm still not sure how I made it through with so few scars to show. As I've mentioned, I'd seen friends fall by the wayside due to drugs, alcohol, or just the stark reality of their surroundings. Death was a fairly regular occurrence within my circle of friends and associated acquaintances. Either that or people would just go missing, never to be heard of again. Perhaps they became casualties of a merciless business, the glowing promises of which led trusting lambs to their willing slaughter. For me, one thing was certain: I wasn't going down. However terrible the situation, I would make it through. And make no bones about it, the situation was about to get very terrible indeed.

#### ONE LESS HEARTACHE

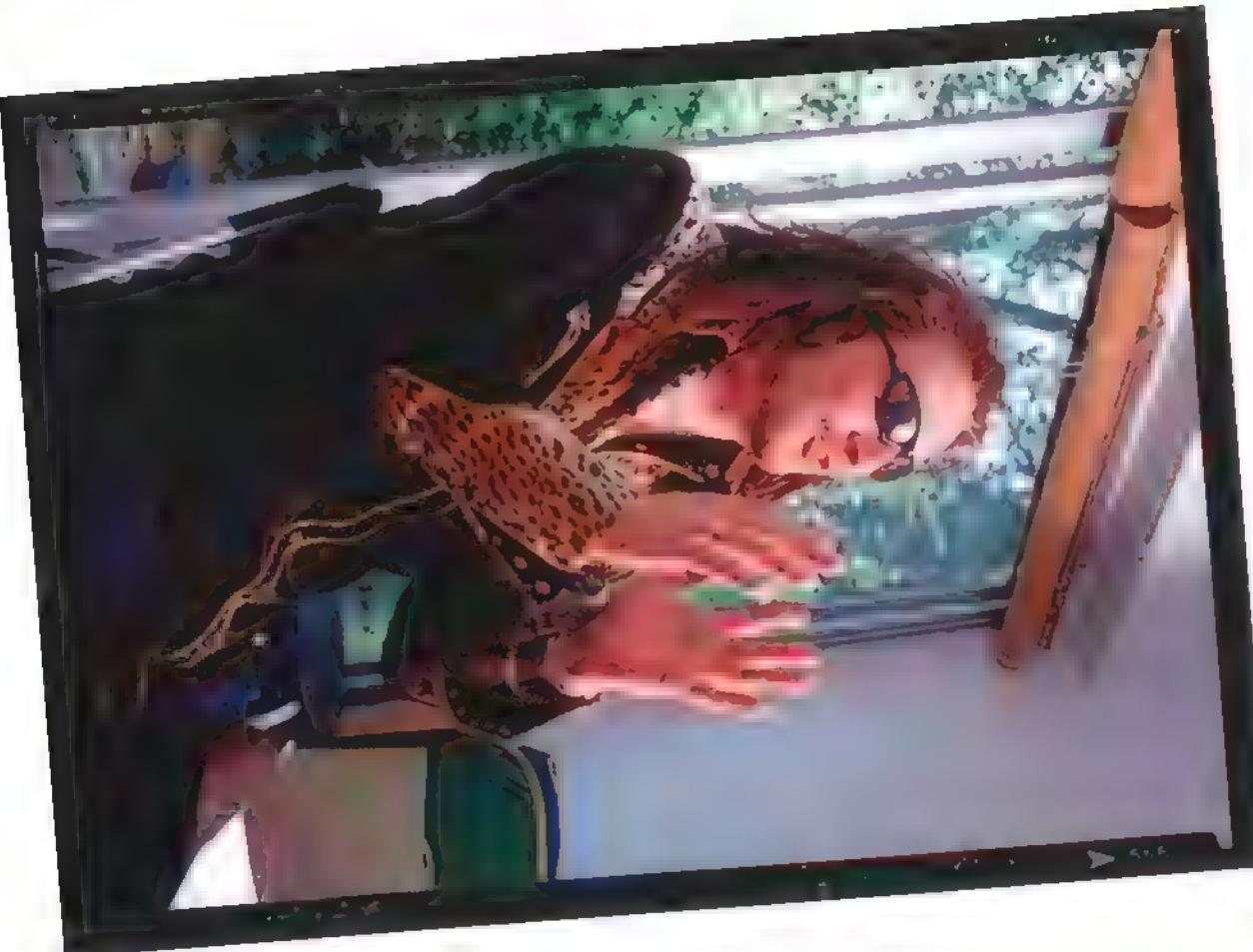
Very few bands are as important to me as Jason & the Scorchers. Their blend of punk and country almost singlehandedly kicked my arse into leaving home to pursue my dreams. Namely, creating musical alchemy. Somehow I got wind that mainman Jason Ringenbergs had heard 'Sick Of Drugs' and liked it. Once I connected with Jason, it was only weeks before we were writing this song together for his forthcoming solo album 'All Over Creation'. I floated a foot from the ground the entire time.

Recording the song was no less memorable, although not for the reasons I'd hoped.

Requesting The Wildhearts as his backing band to record this song was an idea that would have probably worked better in legend than in practice. Before we'd even begun tracking, Danny was asleep in a starfish formation on the floor. He remained

there for the entire session. While we were used to the unconventional behaviour of our bass player by this point (whether it was an unprovoked attack on CJ one time backstage, or simply playing different songs to the rest of us onstage), these inconsistencies were regular. Tiring, but reliable. Jason, on the other hand, was less familiar with this kind of behaviour. "Hey, I didn't know you guys had a dawg!" he stated, attempting to inject some humour into this sad predicament, whilst stepping over the slumbering form on the control room floor. But his disappointment was plain to see.

I took with me two lasting memories of this landmark recording session – one that should have been one of the proudest moments of my life. One memory is of Jason enjoying his first beer in England. A Carlsberg Special Brew – the strongest beer available in the UK.. The second is one of shame, that my band would so effortlessly be the least professional that my hero would ever work with.



CHAPTER NINE:  
THE WILDHEARTS  
MUST BE DESTROYED

Where I will sign  
a new deal,  
embrace pop,  
have a daughter,  
have a breakdown,  
end up in hospital,  
try to hang myself,  
get clean and  
sober, tour with  
The Darkness  
and take up  
drugs again.



We demoed the collection of songs that would make ‘The Wildhearts Must Be Destroyed’ at the very cosy 2khz Studios in west London. The band were then shipped to the far less homely Chapel Studios near Skegness. Just south of Grimsby on the Lincolnshire coast, it’s a weather-beaten seaside town with very little in its favour other than a cheap recording studio.

As we set up our gear and began recording the drums, it soon became evident that someone was absent. Our bass player wouldn’t be joining us until later. Then later became much later. Later still – following a surreal set of text messages – it turned out that he would in fact not be attending the sessions at all. On the grounds that “the songs weren’t good enough”. While this news may have been constructive if it had been delivered during the rehearsal or demo stages of production, there was little we could do while recording was actually taking place. We had deadlines to reach, a schedule to maintain and a very small budget with which to make it all work. Taking time off to write a batch of different songs wasn’t an option. Already nearing the end of my rope – but still with a few yards to spare – I decided that instead of teaching a new guy an entire album worth of songs, I’d just play the bass parts myself. That way we’d still hit our deadlines. On hearing this, our errant bass player informed me that if I were to play bass on the album, he would refuse to tour it.

The choice between a rock and a hard place would have been a blessing at this point. But it would appear that we were either fucked or fucked. Or we’d get another bass player for the tour. With a recording advance laid on by newly inked-in partners Gut Records (an outfit which our manager sourced on our behalf), pulling out of our commitment wasn’t a consideration. We would plough on through with me singing, playing guitar, playing bass and co-producing. Having a choice in the matter would remain a luxury beyond our means.

With cocaine acting as a gelling agent for the band, we decided to up the tempos from the demos and record the songs at a more sprightly pace. A scatter-brained decision that simply removed the groove from the songs and shortened the album. So before we’d even laid down one song, we were one man down and already tearing up plans. Yep, The Wildhearts were back.

### **ONLY LOVE**

Originally written and intended for Annie Lennox to sing, the inclusion of ‘Only Love’ was a very last minute decision based on a need to explore my pop sensibilities with the band. I considered it a very brave move at the time and one that I was determined to make. If this was to be our pop-rock album then I wanted to see how far we could push the band into more melodic terrain. I suffered no such apprehension when exploring distorted noise, but melodic songs somehow frightened me to death. Openly accepting pop-rock was something that my punk ethics had stubbornly refused, but I was a fully paid-up devotee of Cheap Trick, The Babys, Angel, Hoodoo Gurus, Big Star, etc, and now considered it a ballsier move to embrace this style than to pretend otherwise. It was time to come out!

Of all the songs that we decided to speed up on the album, ‘Only Love’ suffered the worst in my opinion. The lurching groove I had in my head is missing from

### **NEXUS TONIGHT**

this version and the spiky new wave urgency that replaced it sat entirely at odds with the subject matter. (In fact it remains one of the few songs I'd like to record again some day.) But at this point with The Wildhearts, peace was quickly being replaced by turbulence and even the sound was being affected by this unavoidable aggression.

### SOMEONE THAT WON'T LET ME GO

Based on the kind of Cheap Trick riff I'm amazed I beat them to writing, this is a solid live favourite and one of the very few songs I never get bored of playing. My relationship with Angie was already showing signs of wear and tear which looked unlikely to be fixed. We both sensed it. You can't really call something a problem unless you've had time to sleep on it – and we'd been kipping on our difficulties for months. It was more a case of which of us would be first to mention the obvious brick wall hurtling towards us at speed. Ultimately, neither of us would. The inevitable impact at least saved us the chore of considering solutions. Solutions, after all, would be a compromise on our staunch refusal to yield. Stubborn to the bitter end? Fuck that, we were formulating the bitter end to end all bitter ends. A super acerbic breakdown, the rancid zing of which would never leave either of our palates. And probably never will.

### ONE LOVE, ONE LIFE, ONE GIRL

Angie had just given birth to our daughter, our second child together, whom I had barely set eyes on her since her arrival in the world. I'd been present to cut the umbilical cord but I had spent criminally little time at home. Pressing deadlines dictated the urgency of events and we needed to hit those deadlines in order to start earning. With the benefit of hindsight, this would have been the perfect time to take a break. But with no cashflow and no management or record label to bankroll time off, taking leave from work was an impractical luxury that we could barely afford to even fantasise about. Still, try explaining that to a child.

I loved this song. Right from jamming it on the couch to its finished recording. Obviously the subject matter was dear to my heart, but beyond that I thought it was another brave step – embarking on another radical departure for the band's sound. And this time I really thought the song held its own as a standalone track. With a licensing agreement freshly negotiated with US label Gearhead, 'The Wildhearts Must Be Destroyed' would be the band's first official North American album release.

It's interesting to note that the melodic essence of this album is what US fans like about it – the very same thing that UK audiences hate about it.

### GET YOUR GROOVE ON

Featuring the vocal talents of both Andy Cairns ('Therapy?') and Justin Hawkins ('The Darkness'), this attempt at a NOFX-paced punk blast actually turned out great. From what I gather, it's not that much of a fan favourite. But along with 'Nexus Icon', it's my favourite song on the album.

In the middle of recording it was announced that we'd be forced to take a studio break and go on tour. Presumably to pay for the rest of the album to be completed.





Recording is done in a relatively sedate environment. For us it involved sitting around, listlessly drinking, eating junk, staying up all night, waiting for your turn to play and generally living a less than healthy lifestyle. To immediately go from that to an environment of athletic expectations – leaping around a stage and entertaining a paying audience – was a big ask. Especially as afterwards we'd be immediately plonked right back into the studio to regain the previous recording vibe. That, my friends, is a decision of which only a fool could make sense.

For starters, we still didn't have a bass player. I'd considered playing bass on the tour myself but our guitar parts were just too tricky for one player. I decided to engage the talents of Jon Poole – someone who I knew could learn the set quickly and step up to the plate.

I will say now that his treatment at the hands of some of the so-called fans was disgusting. On more than a few occasions, and for the very first time ever, I was embarrassed by members of our crowd. Shouts of "bring back Danny" and "fuck off" would see a brave and humble man visibly hurt. This grossly unfair behaviour sickened me – especially knowing how much more extreme the reaction would have been if we'd have simply pulled the tour. Jon was the reason why we were even there playing and people were championing the guy who wanted the tour cancelled? I'd always tried to keep the band member's private lives away from the public – which I considered a code of honour. But in turn that was something which left the audience free to make up their own stories. Many did just that.

"Danny had been unfairly replaced."

"Ginger is a controlling manipulator."

The accusations would get so outlandish and personal that even some family members joined in the fray. At that point all I could do was just dig in and wait for the storm to pass. On tour I hid with the help of a medical bag of prescription drugs that the support band, Amen, had in their possession. I hit that stash as heavily as their singer would allow me. Add a bottle of absinthe a day and a regular supply of cocaine and I was able to forget it all.

Forget the album lying half finished in a studio in Skegness. Forget personal attacks by an uninformed lynch mob. Forget the gaping holes in our new hopes for The Wildhearts. But, most pressingly, forget how badly I was missing my baby girl back home in London. It took a lot to forget that and get on with the job at hand. So I took a lot.

It was on this tour that I met Scott. Sorry – then playing bass for Amen – and a lifetime friendship was instantly struck. This was the only good thing I remember from this tour. But it was one of the only things I remember from this tour.

## **SO INTO YOU**

Written around a song title that CJ had suggested, we co-wrote this song very quickly. Instantly I knew we had a single on our hands – of which I personally had very high hopes.

At this time I was reintroduced to some old Bristolian chums from back in the day. Bear and Beano – the team behind the amazing *Bugs & Drugs* comic zine and designers of the ‘If Life Is Like A Lovebank...’ 10” inner sleeve fold-out. On discovering that they had recently branched into video, I wasted no time in getting them involved in the promo for this single. They shared vital aesthetic views with me – twisted little details I’d rarely find in artists and directors aiming for more mainstream careers. I trusted their bizarre directions regarding our performance. These mostly involved sitting on boxes with steering wheels in our hands, pretending to drive demonic muscle cars, swaying and ducking on cue.

When I received the finished hi-tech, high-speed car chase video, I knew we’d finally made a visual offering watermark'd with actual genius. I loved it and TV loved it.

Even more impressive was hearing how they turned down an offer to make a Radiohead video during the course of making ours. No matter how much Radiohead’s people begged or upped their financial offer, my *Bugs & Drugs* buddies stayed true to their word. This is something I’ve seldom seen in all my years in this cut-throat and desperate industry. The very rare traits of true gentlemen and genuine artists.

Sadly, the video didn’t perform as well as I’d hoped and the single stalled at no. 22 in the charts, unable to pierce the top 20. Inability to penetrate the top 20 meant no *Top Of The Pops* appearance and no *Top Of The Pops* appearance meant the end of promotion. And no promotion meant the death of the single. Getting closer to the ground with every knock back, I found that hitting the dust wasn’t even much of a fall any more.

#### WHERE'S ONLY ONE HELL

Exhaustion, the debauched lifestyles, or sheer volume of disappointments. It’s hard to pinpoint a specific reason for the complete disintegration that was about to take place. ‘There’s Only One Hell’ was written confident in the knowledge that no matter how bad things got, I would always fall on familiar terra firma and start again. I was a survivor. I’d been down so many times I knew when it looked like up to me. I was always prepared to hit ground zero. But what I wasn’t prepared for was the surprise discovery of extra floors underneath. Levels below even those on which I’d previously fallen.

We had returned from the Wildhearts/Amen tour. We’d been given a day to kiss babies, partners and pets. We were then made to pack a bag and get straight back to the studio to resume work on the album. I had no idea how close to the edge I was and obviously no one else noticed such trivialities. We had re-recorded ‘Vanilla Radio’ for the new album, playing the drums over the track of the original song in a bid to perfectly match the previous single (the reasons for which are lost in time).

I remember it all seeming so utterly hopeless, but soldiered on as I had in the past (during previous re-recordings of things like ‘29 x The Pain’ and ‘Weekend’).

“Just listen to the experts,” I’d remind myself. The album session was beginning to blur into an endless succession of parts. This is commonplace when recording more than a dozen songs so I wasn’t concerned by the malaise, it came with the

territory. But something felt different, something I hadn't felt before. I'll try my best to describe it.

Once in the vocal booth to finally nail down a vocal performance, even the task of moving my jaw became heavy. At the same time, my body started to feel like weights were being placed on it like a game of Buckaroo. The ceiling of the vocal booth seemed as if it was decorated with Persian-style silk drapes - like a *Carry On* movie version of a harem. Then the billowing swathes of silk slowly began lowering into my peripheral vision.

It was an odd state of affairs, granted, but one that I blamed on tiredness. But unlike the annoying onset of fatigue, I was enveloped by a sense of calm. A feeling that I wanted to hold onto and not let go. I felt strange but that also felt fine, just fine.

At this point my feet began sinking into the floor. By the time the carpet was up beyond my shins, I had disappeared from the room. I regained semi-rational consciousness in the pub nearby, with engineer Russ Russell attempting to revive me with double whiskies. The last thing I remember was seeing someone on the other side of the bar seemingly laughing in our direction. As I furiously tried to climb over the bar to attack him, I blacked out again. The next memory is being in a local hospital room - again with Russ - before being bundled into a car and driven back to London to see a psychiatrist who recommended a spell in a local hospital to undergo tests to assess which medication would best suit my illness.

The psychiatrist didn't treat my case, however. Instead he went on a golding trip and left the job to a woefully inexperienced subordinate who (with very little further involvement) would administer the following drugs, daily:

**Sertraline (aka Lustral, an antidepressant) 50 mg**

**Zopiclone (a sleeping pill) 15mg**

**Librium (aka Chlordiazepoxide, a tranquilizer) 60mg**

**Chlorpromazine (aka Largactil, a tranquilizer) 50mg**

**Diazepam (aka Valium) 80mg**

**Lithium (a mood stabiliser) 800mg**

After five or six days of walking aimlessly around my room, drifting in and out of consciousness, I noticed a string in the waistband of my hospital pyjamas. I'd been thinking about Danny Deen a lot lately and started wondering what colour a person went before they died from asphyxiation. Not something I'd normally focus upon, but given the above cocktail of pharmaceuticals, I was hardly focusing at all. I decided for some reason that now would be as good a time as any to find out for myself what colour a person's face goes when strangled. I tied the string to the flimsy shower rail, wrapped the other end around my neck and watched myself turn purple in the mirror. Before I could say, "hmmm, interesting," I was out cold. My weight brought the shower rail crashing down breaking my one way journey out of there, and my way out of The Wildhearts. Finally? Hardly. A shower rail in a psycho ward offers massive impracticalities for hanging anything heavier than a hamster.

Medical negligence is a black mark on the CV of any up-and-coming Harley St quack, so the subordinate in charge of my case moved for a verdict of attempted suicide. At the same time he urged that I be sectioned at Whittington's, a psychiatric unit in

London's Archway. Effective immediately. Or at least before the chief psychiatrist returned from his golfing trip.

It was here that the local Crisis Response & Resolution Team stepped in and saved the game (and my freedom). They insisted that I receive daily visits at home, with the more sensible recommendation of Diazepam, Zopiclone and plenty of water and rest. Within two weeks I had weaned myself off all medication, got myself clean and sober and went back to the studio to finish off the album. Without the Crisis Response team, I doubt I would be writing this book.

#### IT'S ALL UP TO ME

It certainly did seem all up to me at this point. My continued involvement marked the end, or the continuation, of the band. As much as every fibre in my person screamed "get out", I couldn't leave a job unfinished.

Plus we'd been promised The Darkness European and USA tour. It was a thank-you for having faith in them when they first started out and taking them out on their first jaunt. Back when no-one could see any worth in their unique brand of camp pomp, I simply adored them. My hunch was paid back by this extremely kind



offer of theirs. However, Gut Records didn't want us to take the tour and pulled the tour budget. So we embarked on a series of shows to pay for the tour bus.

Still shaky from the meltdown, I sang the remaining songs on the album with all the verve I could muster. Before long we were mixing the finished tracks and trying to get the most commercial sound possible out of this mutt of an album. It didn't matter. We had done it. I had finally got through this hideous ordeal and was left with a very positive sounding album in the process. Ironically, something that we might actually be able to sell. Wow, what a story this'll be once the international press start clambering all over us. Right?

I laugh at accusations of trying to sell out with 'The Wildhearts Must Be Destroyed'. Truth is, I was just desperate to get the album finished. The commercial value of the final product wasn't even a consideration with all the nightmares going on around and within me. The band was a mess and the label was already showing signs of disinterest. Now a major tour was on offer and we were about to get our biggest chance yet of gaining some traction in USA. Selling out? I was just fucking clinging on. But I was sober and I was dedicated. I began shaking off the alcohol weight instantly and by the time we headed out on tour with The Darkness I was boxing, training, lifting weights and running regularly.

Even if the band imploded on the road, fell out with each other, killed each other or just drank themselves to death, I was going to leave my mark on this most elusive of markets. This place that had inspired my youth more than even my own country. I was finally going to tour America.

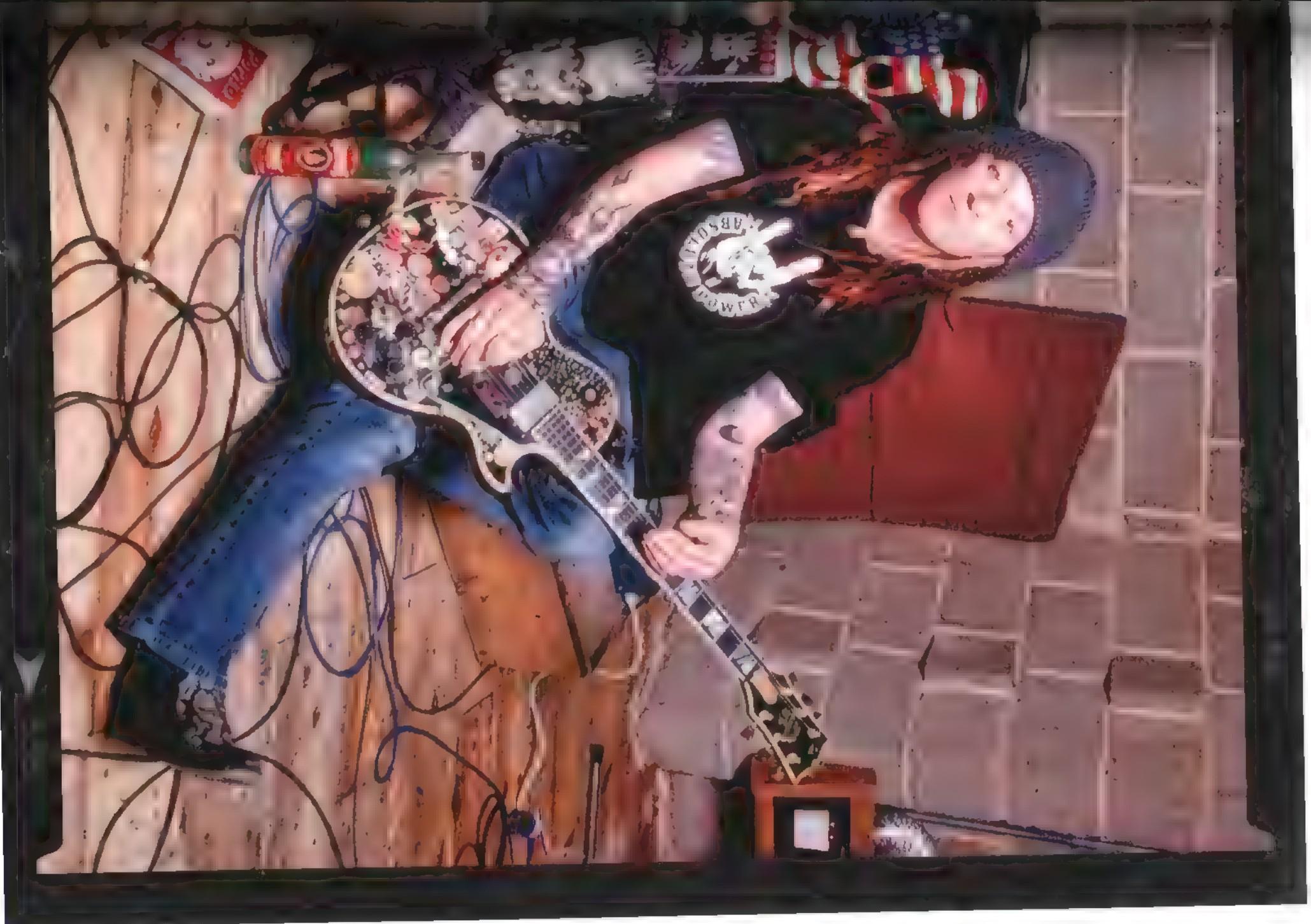
#### TOP OF THE WORLD

Try as I might, it's hard to ignore the godawful video that Gut Records landed us with for this song. Assuring us their top people were on it and that it would look amazing, they delivered the dullest and by-the-numbers piece of detritus I'd ever seen made by anyone. Or almost seen. I still haven't watched the entire video from start to finish. All I know is that we're playing as a trio on a roof in London whilst two very cold females try unsuccessfully to look like they're in Los Angeles. It is utterly fucking shit.

The Darkness tour - on the other hand - started out great. The audience seemed to like us. We sounded great. Jon Poole tightened up the rhythm section that had been sloppy for so long and I was hammering up my role as frontman to the best of my abilities. By the time we hit the USA we had most definitely modified our rag-tag bunch into formidable unit. Taut and fiery, we knew we were giving The Darkness a run for their money and keeping them on their toes. Both bands were propelling each other to deliver better performances night after night and it was working. The tour was exciting people beyond any hype. The bands were making audiences actually believe in rock 'n' roll once more. People talked about an English explosion again. And if The Darkness were kicking open the door, then The Wildhearts were gatecrashing that fucking party too. Then something very strange happened. The Darkness got huge.

They had been selling out clubs with ease. The smart money was on them continuing in this fashion, feeding demand, adding dates and continuing to sell





them out until they held the States at fever pitch. The plan was then for them to take a short break to do a second album. It was the textbook US music invasion I'd seen so many times before. Just stick to the plan, boys. This one's in the bag. But they didn't.

The second half of the tour was taken out of heavily sold-out clubs and placed into arenas. Badly sold arenas at that. With the stage often pushed so far to the front of the room that behind the curtain lay aircraft hanger-sized emptiness. Enough to downsize even the most ardent of newly birthed rock god chutzpah. You could see it was sinking The Darkness too.

They played basically the same gig – just with a bigger ticket price and a few more lights. All the while trying desperately to showcase hastily-written new material. But they confused the audience more than anything. The whole exercise seemed like an ill-advised management or label decision that derailed a perfectly good run of success. Suddenly the US victory started to rattle at the bolts. I don't know how The Darkness felt about this move but I wanted to castrate whoever was responsible for the disgraceful attempt at a premature jump to bigger status. Especially since conquering the existing level was so damned satisfying. For both bands.

As gaps within The Darkness ship started letting in water, its immediate effect on us on us was startling. Members of The Wildhearts started to act out rock star fantasies. Groupies were brought along on the bus, orders were yelled at people, our hosts were insulted and the band fought between themselves. It began to feel shameful. Even the extremely mild-mannered Jon Poole smashed up a £3000 Firebird guitar and hid the parts. They weren't difficult to find. Our recently acquired team spirit would prove a little more elusive to relocate.

Very soon cocaine use would send individual members of The Wildhearts in separate directions – both physically and emotionally. I soberly watched this typically British aversion to success taking place all around me. I found myself alone





in Washington. All members of the band on the bus were either bickering with each other, drinking by themselves or struggling with personal demons somewhere.

I began by walking the sketchy streets of downtown DC feeling a familiar flush of anger flare up. I sensed that all I'd worked for was collapsing again. Like it always did. Like it always would. Dark characters scuttled by, strangers engaging eye-to-eye contact and asking for cigarettes. They brought back a dark comfort I'd missed and had always enjoyed in new yet familiar situations such as these. I always felt at home surrounded with a downtown atmosphere - wherever I found it. It felt like home. Away from my tour bus without my guitar and my songs, I was more like one of these people than the ungrateful prima donnas in my band. Pulling my hood over my head, I nestled into the dusk and the nightshift. I took all the money I had in my pocket. I located the people I needed to find. I bought a stem and a bag of rocks. And I started smoking.

CHAPTER NINE B:  
THE WILDHEARTS  
MUST BE DESTROYED  
THE B-SIDES

## THE PEOPLE THAT LIFE FORGOT

Back in the familiar surroundings of Pete Winkelman's Linford Manor studios, the band settled in for a weekend of recording B-sides. We had no songs going in - my idea was to see if we could begin a session with nothing and come out a few days later with three finished tracks. We invited our live soundmen to control the mixing desk for the session. This was an experiment that would ultimately teach me more about myself than anything else. Let me explain.

With little surprise, the musical contributions I'd hoped from the band turned out to be meagre. But CJ came armed with a few ideas for which I was thankful. Still, we were there to record three new songs over a weekend so it was up to me to hastily cobble together some tracks based on more than a couple of ideas. I was happy to work with any parts available - as well as rely on any subject matter at hand. Namely our lives, friends, families and current habits. There was always a rich source of material orbiting around the ever-ubiquitous themes of drama, drugs and the dysfunctional. Hey, write what you know, y'know?

I respond well to pressure, so in no time I was churning out ideas. I taught them to the band on the spot and we recorded them hot from the oven. To begin with, it was all fairly exciting. There were a lot of 'people that life forgot' around at this time. Judgmental trouble-makers who would gleefully take sides whenever two people in the band didn't see eye-to-eye (which was often). The type who were always keen to involve themselves in other people's business. I've always despised these kinds of malignant people, so these were some of the easiest lyrics I ever penned.

Listen out for the chunky fuck-up in the middle of the song, when the riff comes back in. This is where mixing engineer Simon Efemey didn't hear the riff the way I wrote it and somehow misaligned the parts on tape. The resulting mess is the aural equivalent of a band falling down a flight of stairs together.

## LAKE OF PISSES

Before long, the sessions had started to stretch around the clock. Not a great surprise in rock 'n' roll, but a problem if the band are all high on cocaine and the studio engineers are flagging pot smokers. Our live engineers fled the session and I was left in charge.

Running with a verse idea from CJ, we wrote it keeping in mind our love for Soul Asylum. Until it started to sound a little too much like the Goo Goo Dolls for my liking. At this point I came up with a chorus that put some hair back on its balls and eventually we ended up with a decent hodgepodge of a song. I always enjoyed middle sections where we got to play a little lead guitar together. A rare chance to shred here and there. That ain't no crime, but I do consider too much showboating blatantly offensive.

The chorus expresses the view that if you accept compromise in your music, then you should expect to feel shame at some point. I imagine that's all part of the pact anyway. People who sell themselves down the river probably shake off shame like a dog seeing off fleas. Whoring yourself must feel natural otherwise how could

you go on doing it after the first time? Personally I couldn't, but I get the concept that a man must feed his family.

Still in the absence of family commitment, the desire to be a corporate stooge is something I really don't understand. I guess one guy's stuffed wallet is another guy's needle. I couldn't actually tell you what the verse of this song is saying. Even close scrutiny of CJ's lyrics often baffled me. I'd study them for hours and still be unable to tell if there were deeper meanings at play, or if I was just looking at words that rhymed with other words. Nonetheless, one of the better efforts in a surprisingly enjoyable set of B-sides.

#### **RETURN TO ZERO**

As far as I was concerned, any excuse for a thrash workout was a good enough excuse for a thrash workout. Cursed with an acute sense of melody, I secretly longed to be the guitarist in a punk/thrash band, but the tunes always got in the way. Based around a grindcore intro belonging to our guitar tech, Hot Steve, I simply added a Helmet style riff and the song sprinted from the starting blocks like a Malamute off its leash.

'Return To Zero' was recorded as wasted as we could possibly get – which was substantially. I do love how much fun it sounds like we're having here. You can hear it. Or at least I can. I always maintained that if we'd have worked as hard at being a group as we did at being a party, we'd have been an arena band. Ultimately the latter always won out until only the hangovers got bigger.

Being a massive fan of Bob Mould, and Husker Dü, barely audible vocals never bothered me in the slightest. But judging by the sheer amount of complaints I've heard relating to vocal levels, I gather this is a sore point that bugs the shit out of everyone else. The plain truth is that we were swerving dangerously close to 'Endless Nameless' territory with this one. So I can't say I was unduly concerned about criticism. In fact I often welcomed it. The way I regarded it was that if I've pissed you off, then I've at least woken you up.

#### **ACTION PANZER**

A spectacularly nasty set of lyrics about a couple's sexual union – the identities of whom don't need mentioning. It's way too personal and I doubt either party remember the tryst – nor its subsequent effects – with fondness. Suffice to say that without having to suck a dick in purgatory for it, some people tend to fuck with the conscience of stray dogs.

A staggeringly mean-spirited song. I will admit to being rather proud of this ugly little bastard; I do 'cold' very well. While I try to keep it from the surface, I don't mind letting my feelings out of the cage in lyrics. It's harder to get arrested that way.

The middle section is from a lyric by CJ which bears no relation to the song's subject matter. It's safe to say he's a far less vicious wordsmith than myself – which I imagine he'd be happy about. I'm far more of a bastard when it comes to lyrics. Or maybe I just enjoy completely candid writing? Still, when our sweet-savoury fusion works, then it works to great effect. I think this is a good example.

Pissed off and furious, then. It's ironic to consider that 'Action Panzer' was one of the names I wanted to call my firstborn. True story. His mum wasn't as keen on the idea.

### 6:30 ONWARDS

This is an odd one. I can't remember writing or recording this song at all. A compelling set of cocaine-inspired lyrics. It's themed around the difficulty in dealing with evenings (something I still have a problem with) and the subsequent need for self-medication (something I no longer have a problem with).

I'm sure I could be alone on a desert island and I'd still know when it turned 6:50pm.

Something in my heart sinks when faced with the fact that the day is as good as it's going to get. I turn anxious and my natural reaction is to fight the boredom and make an event out of the evening – at the very least. Like I said, I still struggle with this concept to this day. Only now I've replaced crack with Peanut M&Ms and a movie.

This song features one of the most unlikely arrangements that I can imagine writing, yet it retains some kind of floundering charm which I can't quite pinpoint. Writing songs on drugs produced some interesting results. While I wouldn't consider any of them my best work, I do like listening to something that sounds like it was written by someone else. In short, I'm not sure why, but I do like this song. I also think I'm safe in assuming that I'm alone in this affection.

### EAGER TO LEAVE 'ER

I remember having to pull my car off the Westway in London when I came up with this song title. I was laughing like a barking walrus so much I thought I would throw up. By the time I reached my destination, the song was written. I still have no idea why I like it so much – or why I find it so funny – but it's a favourite of all my song titles.

It has plenty of flavour too. Although it's patently not to everyone's taste because I'm yet to meet anyone else who actually likes this song. Another case of my personal penchant for a lyric bypassing the audience entirely. Amid a painful break-up, the levity of one's words naturally lifts the spirits of the protagonist beyond that of the listener. This is all part of the strange, medicinal purposes of music. A two-way street of emotional traffic traveling in different directions. And that's okay.

Either way, I'm rather fond of this little oddity. The spiky lyric is simply about an argument with my girlfriend. One that proved to be very prophetic indeed. We did break up and she did go on to blame her unhappiness on the next guy and the next guy. Some people can ignore the negativity of their own habits just as long as there are people to blame. Accountability is a choice easily avoided, which is why most people do exactly that. Anyway, she continues to do so and I continue to love this song. Some things are unlikely to change.

Where I will  
lose my family,  
take up heroin,  
move to Los Angeles,  
take up crystal meth,  
move to Texas, see  
the light, record  
my first solo album,  
meet some ghosts  
and discover the  
meaning of life.



## VALY

I returned from the US tour with The Darkness to face a complete breakdown in domestic communication. Angie and I had grown so far apart emotionally that parenthood was all we held in common.

We agreed that I should move out of the house and rent a nearby flat so I could see the kids as regularly as I was allowed. We'd call it a trial separation but we could both feel the solid brickwork being built between us. In actuality, the proximity made the situation worse. The pain of separation was excruciating enough but the torture of being so close was agony on another level entirely. Endless days waiting for a suitable time to visit the kids, then the endurance of the lonely evenings once they'd been put to bed. First I tended to the sorrow with alcohol, but I found the alcohol made me want to call Angie all the time - something she'd asked me not to do.

It was hopeless. Once again I could feel sanity slowly beginning to slip away. One day whilst aimlessly walking around Finchley Road on my regular visit to Blockbusters to kill another evening, I found myself talking to a *Big Issue* vendor. I found out that he was expecting his dealer to arrive any time soon. Ooh, an unexpected thrill. At this point anything remotely interesting was fair game. Within an hour I was sitting in my flat, watching a movie and toking on a crack pipe. It was the best I'd felt in a very long time.

At first it was an occasional treat. Before long it was every evening. Inevitably, as I got to know the dealers personally, scoring became easier and more regular until I was smoking in the mornings too. At no point did I deny the sheer madness of my actions. It simply seemed utterly unavoidable. Viewing my situation from the point of view of a third party, I was aware of my own stupidity as I created an enemy borne from my own loneliness. I felt wretched. The resulting despair was a monster constructed of fear. One to be avoided. One that would certainly kill me if confronted. It would string me up on a rope and it would hang me. Sure enough.

I had successfully talked myself into stalemate - the pipe or suicide. My addiction made me feel ugly and useless, but these were still only feelings. I was still feeling. Suicide, on the other hand, would have pushed me beyond feeling. I was getting ready for that.

## TEN FLAWS DOWN

Before long, my addiction became all-consuming. I cruised the Swiss Cottage/Finchley Road/ Kilburn area to score from a number of different crack dealers who were supplying a three mile radius of addicts.

One morning there was simply no supply. A recent giant seizure of cocaine had completely dried up the market. Fellow addicts I associated with thought little of this. They simply leant on heroin until the flow returned. But I wasn't using heroin - yet. I'd tried it, but hadn't got along with it. As previously mentioned, I was a puker. Apart from anything, I considered it a poor substitute for the massive hit that crack provided. Heroin seemed a lightweight alternative.

But in this instance with my habit at the stratospheric level it had reached - I had little choice. It was heroin or nothing. Nothing wasn't going to get me through the day. Once normal service had been resumed a few days later, I subsidised my habit with a little brown powder - just to ease myself down from the intense crack rush.

Soon I was taking speedballs. At this point I began overdosing, roughly once a month. After taking the hit I'd feel a definite wrong turn in the effect and come around on the floor - often the best part of a day later. I was alone every time too. Something seemingly wanted to keep me alive. But that something certainly wasn't me. Once I took that huge hit, I didn't care if I made it to the other side of the rush or not.

This heavy use continued for about six months - right up until my 40th birthday when I decided enough was enough. I would take my last hit the night of my birthday show. Then on December 18th, 2004, I would quit both heroin and crack. I'd make a new start. It had gone as far as it was going to go. I'd be one of the lucky ones and escape while I still had teeth and a choice.

The day after my 40th I boarded a flight to the Philippines with Angie and the kids. She knew I'd been using drugs to some extent. I decided it was time to fess up completely. I told her that I was going to get clean. She was delighted. I told her I was going to ask her to marry me. She said she intended to accept. Then I confessed to using heroin for the last six months. She told me she was leaving me.

This was no idle threat - she meant every word.

I spent the first two weeks in Manila going through the cold turkey of heroin withdrawal on the floor of a spare bedroom in Angie's family home. I was violently withdrawing like a demon. Just me and a guitar. I'd pick up that guitar and in between vomiting, insomnia and intense body spasms, I wrote 'Ten Flaws Down'.

Once the two weeks were up and I was well enough to travel, we went to visit Boracay beach with our families. Even my mother was present, so we tried to salvage at least a suntan from what was originally intended to be a family holiday. On arrival at the island I ate a bowl of oysters. Shortly afterwards I was told that oysters become poisonous after a storm. This was a few weeks after one of the biggest tsunamis had ever hit Asia. I contracted food poisoning so severely that it made the heroin withdrawal seem like a hangover. Bedridden, unable to be move and be flown to a hospital, I was placed on a drip whilst my progress was grimly monitored.

Weakened from the drug withdrawal and with the poisoning at such an extreme, the doctors weren't certain that I'd live through it. For a week I drifted in and out of consciousness. I woke only to evacuate non-existent bodily fluids, wheeling my saline stand to the bathroom with me. I often collapsed before making it back to bed.

On the day we were to return home, I was eventually well enough to leave the bed and the island. My mother was heartbroken and my family was in pieces. I was given my marching orders early so I headed back to the UK alone. Back in London, I closed the front door behind me and faced an empty house. I unpacked my bags, clean, sober, confused and entirely destroyed. I realised I'd come to the end of the road. In my mind, things couldn't get any lower. Now would be a good time to give up.

I calmly sat on the couch and willed myself to die. I could very definitely feel my life ebbing away from me. My breathing slowed to a stop and a comfortable darkness took over. I knew I could keep going - deeper and deeper. I could make this work. I could get out now. As I began to lose consciousness, the letters J-A-K-E came into my vision. Not the sound of the word, not a picture of his face, just the letters. Large capital letters. I still don't understand why things occurred in this way, but that is exactly what happened. I regained consciousness and decided I would move to Australia.

### **THIS IS ONLY A PROBLEM**

After the fiasco of The Darkness tour, the mood was dire within The Wildhearts. Despite having Japanese dates booked, I felt that calling it a day was the only logical step. The rest of the band weren't speaking to each other. With the current state of my personal problems, I couldn't face trying to re-assemble the malfunctioning unit.

I effectively severed Japanese business connections I had spent years developing. It would take almost ten years of hard work before these bridges were rebuilt. But at the time, my own health had to come first.

Our tour manager sold all of the band's gear. Mesa Boogie amps and cabs - that we'd bought for The Darkness tour - to pay back tour guarantees lost as a result of the cancellation. In short, I had lost everything. I'd start again with nothing. Je ne regrette rien.

In fact I had one regret: that we were planning on recording our next album in Austin, Texas - at Willie Nelson's Pedernales studio. I was and still remain a huge fan of Willie's. I would have considered it a dream come true to make an album at the place where he and so many others had recorded - including the Rolling Stones and Frank Sinatra. I guess regret - much like disappointment - was simply a by-product of working with The Wildhearts.

Out of the blue I got a call from Scott Sorry - the bass player I'd met on the Amen tour. Before I had a chance to tell him my plans (to move to Australia, join a bar band and spend my remaining years on the beach), he excitedly told me how he'd just landed the job playing in a band called Brides Of Destruction. Scott had replaced Nikki Sixx who was instead reforming Mötley Crüe. I'd met The Brides in Japan when Nikki invited me onstage to play 'Shout At The Devil'. I'd immediately hit it off with guitar player Tracii Guns. The universe seemed to be assisting with my plans. So I called off the Australian exile and boarded a plane to L.A. It was my sole intention of convincing Tracii that his four-piece band needed to be a five piece. Featuring me. It worked.

I slept on Tracii's couch while I looked for somewhere to stay. I was targeting trailer park residences in the Malibu area when something called the Phoenix Ranch caught my eye in the listings. It advertised benefits such as an 'energy vortex', a 'sweat lodge' and claimed to be the last remaining Native American gathering site in California. Attractions that were largely lost on an Englishman seeking little more than a caravan. But it was a start in the right direction. I secured the trust of the ranch benefactor - the right honourable Reverend Fred - and somehow persuaded him to let me rent the site's huge lodge house. As opposed to the small

cabin advertised. I promised to return to sign the papers once I'd got my first practice out of the way and had secured the job with The Brides.

At rehearsal, a huge argument broke out between the owner of the space and Traci. This resulted in all the band's gear being left out in the street. Luckily Fred was still awake and we were able to store the gear at the lodge house I'd seen just hours earlier. The palatial old-time building had once acted as a country music studio back in the 50s. Fred was happy to keep the spirit of music alive, allowing the band to use the space as their new rehearsal room. Things were falling perfectly into sync. For now.

*'This Is Only A Problem'* was the first song I wrote to christen my new bedroom upstairs in this grand building. I'd eventually share the top floor with Scott. A decision which proved to be an extremely fucked-up experience – in almost too many ways to list. On my first night there, Fred sat and told me more about this fairly recently refurbished accommodation. His story involved a Mexican family that lived in the lodge in the 60s until one of the children accidentally burned down the building, killing everyone inside. I didn't believe in ghosts any more than I believed in the tooth fairy, but Scott was convinced they were real. After smoking some industrial-strength homegrown pot, it was pretty difficult to deny the loud banging and footsteps all along the corridor and up and down the stairs. These noises took place almost every night and were fairly impossible to ignore. But this was only the beginning, things were about to get really weird.

#### THE MAN WHO DREAMED DEATH

I had quit crack and heroin and was determined to stick to my promise to stay clean if I was going to get back with Angie at some point. But then I was introduced to a dealer friend of the band. He dealt in Xanax and crystal meth. I was wary about getting heavily into new habits – I still carried a world of hurt – but I figured I'd use the Xanax (a sedative to treat anxiety and panic) to kill the memories for now and allow me to sleep. I still had a long way to go to be completely repaired. I wasn't intending on getting there any time soon, but my new friendships in the band would certainly build a foundation to work on.

Some strange nights went by in the lodge. Scott and I would listen to voices and noises that seemed to come from neither inside nor outside. It was like a TV had been left on somewhere, playing a channel that featured nothing but people speaking slowly. The sounds were subtle, almost casual. Even comforting.

I didn't mind at all but Scott would swear that items of his were going missing all the time. Shoes would be moved to different parts of the house. Doors that were wedged shut at night would be open in the morning. Scott naturally started assuming it was me messing with him. As a result of the continuing weirdness, he moved into his girlfriend's place. I was left alone in the house.

What the fuck did I care? I was almost insane with grief. I openly dared any supernatural bullshit to try and mess with me. By this point I was pretty certain I was a scarier proposition than anything the paranormal world could throw at me. I summoned any ghostly intervention and stayed awake to welcome it. I spent so much time alone – awake and dehydrated from crying – that time became an



intangible concept. I existed in a netherworld of uncommon and very dark emotions. Freakish behaviour seemed natural.

After weeks in this fragile mental state, the nightly banging began. The thudding on the walls seemed to be coming from outside of my window. Upon closer inspection, it appeared to be from within the house itself. Children's voices would travel from one end of the landing to the other. Light footsteps ran up and down the stairs at night. All night. Every night. The banging started to get louder. At one point the doors of my room – those old saloon style doors you see in westerns – started rattling. I yelled for them to enter and do their worst. I leapt up to open the doors, only for the sound to travel downstairs. So I ran downstairs only to hear it upstairs again. I'd scream at them, challenging them to try and hurt me more than I was already hurting. But back in my room, as much as those doors shook, they would never burst open. But still the noises continued all around the house.

The next day, the Reverend Fred paid me a visit.

"What in God's name happened here last night?" he demanded. The entire park had reported the noise.

"Did you have guests or something?"

Though I assumed he already suspected, I assured him that I was alone all night.

The truth was hard to argue with – it would have been impossible to transport a houseful of guests up and down a mountain without anyone seeing or hearing any cars. Then one night, my first peak experience took place. This will sound hard to believe, as peak experiences are rare and transcendent moments. Bear with me.

I was sitting on the bed at night, in the dark. I was feeling the usual pain of sadness when a solid beam of sunshine bled through the ceiling and directly down into the top of my head. It impaled me to the bed like a solid pole of positive light. The sadness suddenly vanished. I felt calm and strangely connected to something ancient. I reached over to the guitar and began singing this song on the spot – word for word – as it appears on the album. It really didn't feel like my idea as much as it felt like I was playing a cover song I'd known all my life. I was channelling someone else's melody. I was a conduit and nothing more.

Once I had played the song through – one time only – I can only attempt to describe what happened next. The edges of my arms began dissolving. I had no body – or at least no edges to my body. I had no form. I became the room. Then the edges of the room dissolved and became the outdoors. Everything that seemed like the end of anything continued forever – like colours running in water reaching the sea. It happened quickly and without any doubt whatsoever. It lasted only a few seconds and then everything came back together.

I wanted to run and tell Fred immediately about my divine experience. Instead I found myself waking up the next morning with Fred at the door, a bacon sandwich in his hand.

"It's over," he said.

## MOTHER CITY

Not long after the fall of the Twin Towers, my good friend Nitebob (legendary sound man for acts such as Kiss and Aerosmith) asked if I'd write a song for a Village Voice charity album. I immediately agreed. To be able to help in any way was a genuine honour. New York City was my spiritual home and the source of more inspiration than any other city in the world.

I wanted to write something lighter than might be expected – relating my own personal love of all things New York – from Alfred E. Neuman to Henry Winkler. I expected it to be an emotional experience but I was still surprised just how moving it would be to get these lyrics down – let alone attempt to sing them..

In floods of nostalgic tears, then anger, and finally, pure helplessness, committing the words to paper was an intensely draining struggle. Even before I was aware of its artistic relevance in my life, I'd always enjoyed a long-standing love affair with NYC. So many of my favourite movies and actors, bands and musicians came from here. They all represented New York as a timeless cultural zone that existed outside of America. I'd always felt like a New Yorker. I still do.

The song was eventually rejected from the charity album. But no matter, the official solo album, it felt natural to include this song. Breastfed on American TV, music and art, I consider myself more pro-America than most jingoistic US muckety-mucks who remain clearly unaffected by its tarnished reputation as policeman of the world.

My generation were eagerly spoon-fed a steady diet of icons, superstars, heroes and ideals. We didn't even question our love. It's what America represented to my age group, all around the world. My America wasn't creepy and unpredictable. My America wasn't fearful and paranoid. My America was simply mighty.

I lived in New York and witnessed its transformation into a teeming colony of merciless hustlers and land-grubbing corporate super-villains. But the New York I grew up with refuses to leave me. My New York embraces change like welcoming fresh skin and sizzles with the energy of the new. My New York still exists.

## G.T.T.

G.T.T. is a historical reference to how 19th century American soldiers defected from service to the final lawless state of the USA. They simply announced their departure by leaving the letters G.T.T painted on their door: Gone To Texas.

I originally planned to stick with the Brides Of Destruction for good. I thought we were going to be an important new LA band. All the ingredients were there. We had a great backstory and we were a supernaturally tight band with a killer guitarist.

We also wrote some great new material indicating a classic yet fresh sound. I'd found us an authentically historic new place to rehearse and record. Hell, we even had a great title for the album. 'Thirteen Acres' was the size of the plot of land around the Phoenix ranch up on Latigo Canyon. Everything about this band reeked of the true stench of rock 'n' roll.

Even the house front – intended to feature as the album cover – looked like the Amityville House. The building was rock 'n' roll, a gothic masterpiece. Its backstory read like a fable. I wanted the music to draw from the same well as the great American rock bands on whom I was brought up. The likes of which the world was screaming out for.

So I was rendered speechless when Traci announced that the songs we were working on would be replaced by some demos he'd been working on in private. They were Iron Maiden-style heavy metal numbers with songs about subjects like Lady Godiva. Fantasy topics that would have made little sense to anyone with a passion for real rock 'n' roll. Which included me. The album title would be changed too, from 'Thirteen Acres' to 'Runaway Brides'. The reasons for which were never fully explained.

Even the cool-as-fuck picture of the supernaturally impressive house front – the lodge that actually had a face – would be swapped. In its place would be a photo of the band in a paddling pool playfully splashing water on each other. None of it made any sense to me whatsoever. In fact the only thing that registered with me was that I would have to leave.

I confided with Traci that I couldn't be in a band that played music I didn't respect. He informed me that I was under contract – something that the band had all recently signed. So I couldn't leave. Seriously? He was going to make me play this stuff?

I suggested he check the actual name that I'd signed with. My surname wasn't in fact "Off". "Fuck" wasn't even a legal Christian name.

One day an argument broke out between the band's singer and myself. He'd been complaining about something trivial – willfully ignorant to the amount of real turmoil I was dealing with in my own life. I didn't want whiners around the house so I elected to have him vacate the premises. No violence was used. I wasn't sure that if I let the cork out of my steaming bottle of rage I'd ever get it back in again. Instead I ordered him to leave in no uncertain terms. I threw his bag out the door for good theatrical measure. But instead of flying out the door and dramatically bouncing down the path after him, the bag hit with the doorframe and flew back, badly breaking my finger. A week before the band's first show. And my last.

Scott and I straightened the finger and tied it up as best we could. With gaffer tape. To a bent twig. I played the show with two fingers on my left hand.

On a trip back to England I got my finger checked out. After an examination, the doctor told me that the tendon operating the finger had actually snapped from elbow to hand. Any further practical use of the finger would be impossible.

"But I'm a guitar player!" I said.

"Not any more, you aren't," he replied.

I wanted to throw him through his office window. Instead I left his clinic determined to turn the anger into dedication. I would learn to play guitar again,



something he said I'd never do. To this day, the small finger on my left hand operates independently to the others. Technically impossible, I know, but perfectly true.

When I returned to the ranch in Latigo Canyon, my bedroom had been taken by the band's drummer. I'd been evicted from the house – the very place I'd found for them back when their gear was sitting in the middle of a street in L.A. It turned out that my departure was immediately effective. Fred – who'd agreed to let them record their new album at the lodge – was being held over a financial barrel. They threatened to pull the funding unless he saw me vacate the premises. I felt way worse for him than I did for myself. He wasn't used to this kind of treatment. Me? I was an expert; I'd bounce back like a rubber cockroach.

Fred and I had become close friends while I'd been there. He was mortified by the situation. He gave me a tiny cabin to stay in until I could figure out where my travels were to direct me.

The entire lodge house was decked out as a recording studio. I spent my last few evenings sneaking back in to chat late into the night with the very English, very drunk and very funny Andy Johns, who had been brought in as album producer. Andy's stories had me enthralled and we found an English kinship that I enjoyed until I left the ranch. He was an amazing person. Although I couldn't have played those songs in front of a firing line, I would have loved to have worked with Andy. Along with not recording at Willie Nelson's studio, it was one of my few recent regrets. I was gutted to hear in 2013 that Andy died.

Hiking up my boot-straps and looking to the future, I opened up my phone book for a name that might lead me to my next destination. The name that popped up at random was none other than Ralph Jezzard. The Wildhearts' producer responsible for 'Endless Nameless' who had so effortlessly understood my ideas in the studio. Ralph had produced some of my favourite things I'd ever recorded.

I called the number.

"Hey Ralph, what you up to these days?"

"Hey Ginger, I'm living in Texas," Ralph replied.

"What you doing there?" I asked.

"I'm working as an engineer at Willie Nelson's Pedernales studio in Austin."

Once again, fate had lit up my path like a landing strip.

### **ONLY LONELY**

This is a song I wrote on the Darkness tour about the daughter I'd barely seen. A touching song that I remember playing to Angie when she came to hang out for a few days on the road. She cried. In fact, in our hotel room we both cried hopelessly. At the longing in the lyrics and the continuing hopelessness of our own situation. If we could have salvaged what we had, then we could and should have done right there.

Neither of us had yet met anyone new. A spell in a detox clinic with some overpriced sessions in front of a guidance counsellor may well have been all that was needed to get our train back on track and rolling into the future with a fresh perspective. It could have worked. We just didn't bother trying.

Now lost and alone, I was ordered not to call back home every night - of which I was still in the habit. I needed to let it go, to allow things to move on. Eventually it became evident that one of us had moved on far more efficiently than the other.

At times I was convinced I might actually die of sadness. All the drug withdrawal, the combined disappointments, let-downs and personal tragedies didn't amount to a hill of beans compared to what I was feeling. This was physical pain. My heart actually hurt. Now I was being evicted from the only place I called a home. I was a hobo. But as Fred drove me to the airport - leaving yet another house full of stuff I'd never see again - I felt nothing but the comforting familiarity of moving on. I'd felt it plenty of times in the past. Back to LAX. GRT. Whatever happens, something happens. That's just the way things are.

### **KEEP IT COOL**

It was great to see Ralph again. His lively little boy called George helped fill the void of missing my own son. This was timely and it felt valuable. Finding out that Ralph was working at Willie Nelson's studio - the very place where The Wildhearts next album was supposed to be recorded - acted as a force of synchronicity. My first solo album was propelled into life.

I had enough new material to start the ball rolling immediately. We used downtime at Willie's studio. Beforehand we demoed ideas at Ralph's home set-up. We estimated that within a month we'd have more than enough material to sign to a UK label. Steve Hammonds of the Sanctuary Group had expressed great interest. He seemed an honest type with a genuine love of music.

Recording in advance of label funding was a gamble, but it was one worth taking with all the signs looking so positive. For now, just making music with Ralph - hanging out and drinking the world to rights - was good for both of us. We felt it.

'Keep It Cool' was the first song written in my new Texan home - just basking in the flow of existing synergy. So many great memories flood back from those times. Beer with whiskey shots and pickled sausages from a cornucopia of meat-based Texan snacks. The closeness of two friends - both from recently broken relationships - bonded by a common pursuit, with music as a healing force.

But before we got too ahead of ourselves, I needed to take care of my insomnia. The trauma was now dormant and becoming bearable. Workable. I was going to be okay. I could feel the pressure lifting. I just needed a damn good sleep.

Ralph introduced me to a friend who gave me a handful of sleeping pills and told me, "here, you'll feel a lot better after some rest".

"Thanks mate. Do you do anything else?" I asked out of curiosity.

"As he turned to me and pulled a glass pipe from his pocket, he said, "have you ever tried ice?"

### **PARAMOUR**

This is a cheeky song about an ex-girlfriend and her ex-girlfriend. It was a relationship so intimate that I could barely squeeze myself in. More's the pity I would have loved to have had two girlfriends. Seriously. What a lovely thought. However, apart from three-in-a bed frolics - of which I've always been very fond - the practical side of sharing a woman (or being shared by two women) could never live up to the fantasy. So while 'Paramour' is a semi-innocent bit of fluff, it is based on a real situation.

It's a song I arranged and recorded whilst on meth autopilot. After being introduced to the ice (a pure form of crystal meth) dealer, I'd be awake for days. I worked solidly through the weirdness until a song was complete - fully believing that we'd lose the magic forever if I stopped before it was complete.

When it came to the recording, new parts were seemingly beamed in from elsewhere and plucked from the air. It made these sessions unforgettable. Everything felt so right; it was the pure definition of magical. I was so high I actually thought we had an engineer working with us at Ralph's house. I could have described him in detail. But we didn't: there was only Ralph and myself.

The day after the recording, we nervously pressed play to see if our mania had produced anything more than garbled nonsense. The beautifully dovetailing parts that greeted us on playback were a revelation. Seamless melodic layers created a dreamlike quality that we'd never be able to recreate if forced to work in sober conditions. It absolutely floored us. In fact the backing track already sounded mixed. So we left it and that's what you hear on the album. To this day it remains one of my favourite things I've ever recorded.

I would never suggest that drug-taking enhances music making; the very idea is idiotic. But I will say that being higher than a kite in a storm blocks doubt from entering the creative process. It encourages the artist to accept the abstract without commercial concerns or criticism. Making music on drugs certainly makes you give less of a shit.

### **BULB**

One of the traditional ways of smoking ice is through a scooped-out lightbulb. The screw-in section is removed and a cork or gaffer tape modification is applied. The vapouriser is finished off by inserting two straws into the bulb. The crystals are then dropped inside the bulb and gently heated around the base of the bulb. The smoke is inhaled through one of the straws with the other acting as an air intake. I took to this apparatus like a flame meeting touch-paper. It became the source from which every idea that peppered this new album was born.

Once we'd finished the demo recordings and went to start work at Willie's studio, I was confronted on entry by a vast wall of photos. Previous guests, employees, friends and fans. All smiling next to the legend that is Willie Nelson. But one face

immediately struck me as especially pleasant and familiar. I asked who it was.

"Oh, that's Bucky", said the studio hand.

"Will he be coming by?" I asked, hoping to meet this character whose face radiated a friendly charm.

"No, sir. Bucky died, I'm afraid. He was Willie's last assistant".

A sombre start to the sessions. But I picked up my spirits, lit a bulb full of ice and got to work. Within days we were chugging along like the old steam trains that ran past Ralph's place. I loved being woken by the sound of their classic old whistles that I'd heard in so many movies. Their song added to the lonely mystique and authenticity of the album.

We were working on studio downtime. So we needed to use every hour possible and sacrifice sleep. Sleeping was cheating. Before long, we started hallucinating through sleep deprivation. Not long after, we began seeing the same hallucinations - phantoms walking in and out of the vast live space outside of the control room.

Unconcerned if they were real or not, we soldiered on until Ralph hit the wall. He needed to rest. While he grabbed some shut-eye, I kept writing new parts for the songs yet to be recorded. Once I was alone, it was paranormal showtime. I was about to get a ringside seat for the weirdest shit imaginable.

The control room of the studio had one of those old 40-pound soundproof doors designed to block off the volume of a full band playing right outside. Simply opening one of these things took great effort. One night - alone with my guitar - this door slammed shut with such a force I could feel the wind from it behind me. Then an almighty bang as it connected with its frame. It shook me to my core. I still get goosebumps thinking about it. BANG! I spun around in utter shock. Someone had hung a coat on the inside of the door and I watched as it swung like a pendulum on its hook.

Another incident involved a huge curtain in the control room. Like a casino, we kept this curtain closed at all times. Working around the clock we didn't want to be reminded if it was day or night. I heard an occasional banging behind it, which I assumed to be birds accidentally flying into a window. Concerned by these collisions, I flung open the curtain expecting to see a dozen dazed birds on the ground below the window. But there was no glass window behind the curtain, just a solid brick wall.

We'd also feel a presence during our stay at Pedernales. Inexplicable sounds were recorded to tape. Faders were shifted to different positions when left alone. But not once did we feel this presence to be malevolent. Personally I felt at peace in its company. Often I was disappointed when it wasn't present. One day a local legend - a Texan piano player called Riley Osbourn - came in to lay some keyboards on 'The Man Who Cheated Death'. A thoroughly charming fellow, he complimented me on the song - a great honour from someone who played with Mr. Nelson himself.

"Have you met the ghost yet?" Riley casually enquired. "I think he'd like this song," he said as if was the most natural subject in the world. I wasn't entirely sure if I was being set up as part of an elaborate studio joke. I mentioned that we had

been experiencing a few strange things, but had tried to explain them away. After assuring us that this presence was traditionally a very good sign I asked Riley who the ghost was. He walked me to the wall of photos I'd seen on that first day and pointed directly to the friendly face I'd been drawn to on arrival.

"It's this guy, Bucky. That's Willie's old assistant. He shows up when the music is going well."

It seemed like Bucky had popped by after all.

#### L.O.V.E.

A song that started in Ralph's home studio by laying down a few ideas I had saved from the ranch in Malibu. Its humble beginnings featured guest vocals from local friends in Texas. It was completed as part of the album mix back home in England, with musical turns by Geordie players, making it by far the most international song on the album!

We were in no hurry to finish this languid piece of music. As fragmented as it was, we weren't even sure if it would appear on the album at all. But I'm very glad it did, being as how fond I am of its astral nature.

I'd been celibate for almost a year. Once I'd discovered that Angie was dating again, I had no interest in entering into a new relationship on any level whatsoever. The very idea seemed ridiculous. Part of me was still expecting this whole thing to blow over and for us to get back together. Signs were beginning to point the other way.

For now I was connected to my emotions through my friendships and I was connected to my feelings through my music. For the time being, this was all I needed.

My libido had decreased in proportion to my escalating sadness. While crystal meth is a drug that makes users so horny that orgasm can be achieved by thought alone, I had no craving for human touch. In fact, if I was ever going to trust communication with the opposite sex again, it would be so far in the future I was hoping for a fucking robot.

#### THE WAY

This song's chorus was written back in the flat where I lived in London – around the corner from my family at the height of my heroin and crack cocaine use. I could barely hold the guitar, yet it was still able to speak to me.

This was when I was blacking out on a regular basis. I wouldn't call it overdosing as I'd always come round, – sometimes a day later – on the floor unaware of how I got there. Part of me figured I was just a lucky junkie. But a wiser inner voice convinced me that this was all a temporary experience and that I was being kept around for a bigger picture. The likes of which I couldn't, even conceive, let alone visualise. All I knew was that I was being given a great lesson in how low you can go. I thought I had hit emotional rock bottom. In reality I hadn't come close.

The lowest emotional point would come to me while at the Phoenix Ranch where I'd write the verse to this chorus. Once I knew I was being evicted from my Malibu residence and about to record a solo album in Texas, I started gathering song ideas while packing my meagre belongings. Lost and in limbo, I emotionally reconnected to the chorus that I'd written in a similar state of mind back in London. This odd little song came as a result.

Some say the chorus is too noisy. They might have a point if taken on a purely sonic level. But achieving the intensity of loss and confusion that I was feeling would never be a pleasing listen. Nor did I want it to be. I wanted to take the listener into the dark desperation of the mind of a junkie in one section, then introduce the plaintive longing of a homeless loser the next.

Nothing made sense on any level. So by my own reasoning, the song didn't need to sound any different. It sounds that way by creative design. A musical painting of two sides of complete loneliness; the levels of which I hope no one outside of this listening experience has to endure.

### **YEAH, YEAH, YEAH**

It's impossible to determine how much of the intensive work ethic was being driven by crystal meth, but it's fair to say that the songs were pouring out of me and each sounded as good as the one before. This relentless rate seemed to be helping my mental well-being no end. Along with the ghosts and hallucinations, we kept the studio filled with actual people - a regular cast of guests to keep the energy flowing. Visitors were encouraged to bear gifts designed to keep the party going. And the train certainly kept a rollin'.

Such was the optimism surrounding the creation of the album, I never once expected to meet any opposition trying to sell it. The exciting collection of songs had an undeniable charm and quality that was picked up on by anyone who visited the studio. So when I approached Sanctuary's Steve Hammonds with some unmastered demos, I waited excitedly for the response. I was turned down flat.

Sanctuary was a record label with funds galore. Enough money, in fact, to plough millions into commodities such as notoriously unreliable big-name hard rock and heavy metal bands without any trepidation. Which lost a fortune in the process without any great concern. In comparison, I needed pennies. Just enough to cover costs and promotion. I'd served my apprenticeship in music, I had a decent following in the UK, I had a track record for consistent musical output. Let's face it: the country wasn't exactly drowning in new homegrown rock stars. I came to the table expecting to barter a little, but flat-out refusal seemed unnecessarily cruel.

Just what the fuck did I have to do to get a break? With hindsight, Sanctuary were one of the first labels to suffer in the wake of the great record industry corporate cull. They'd hedged large bets on large game - even trying to rebrand as an "urban" imprint in a bid to attract rap artists to a heavy metal label.

Either way, they'd ignored the pioneering spirit of smaller artists; the very DNA of their own towering rock monolith. Instead of taking notes from the history books laid down by modest rock bands that provided the blueprint from which current

rock giants worked, they'd confused corporate growth with the ability to rewrite history. Power over passion. Ambition over love. Money over music. Like every other corporate colossus being torn apart in the jaws of their own greed, they fell and they fell hard. The smaller bands and artists? The survivors? They just continued to roll along as they'd always done.

It was with no amount of schadenfreude whatsoever that I'd later meet Sanctuary's Steve Hammonds at Download festival where I was performing in support of this album. He made a beeline over to me in order to apologise profusely for turning down 'Valor Del Corazon'. It turns out that once it was eventually released - on my own Round Records label - it became his wife's favourite album.

### THE DRUNKEN LORD OF EVERYTHING

At the time, visitors to the USA were allowed a six month stay on a tourist visa waiver. I'd made the decision to come back to the UK for a quick spell and the last thing I wanted was trouble with immigration. I loved being in Texas and wanted to return - possibly to live.

I was constantly informed that the immigration laws were a waste of time. Reliable friends told me that loads of people in Texas were there illegally and the authorities turned a blind eye. Everyone knew someone who'd been caught and given a second chance. To me it reeked of badly-informed nonsense. Facts gleaned from bar stools rather than law books. While I was never a stickler for rules, I had a feeling this was a situation I wanted to handle properly. I intended to fully educate myself on this particular area of law. Now after legally securing two O-1 working visas, it was advice I'm very glad to have ignored. In fact by the time I reached my mother's house in England, I'd found that my flatmate had already been deported from Texas and wasn't allowed to enter the USA again.

For various reasons, this meant I wasn't going back to Texas either. Another move where I'd leave everything I owned in a house to which I'd never return. Not that I owned much at this time but I did leave my last few guitars there. These included a Paul Stanley Ibanez Iceman that was bought as a gift by my good friend Tom Abraham (of The Wildhearts' 'Tom Take The Money'). That was it, I was now out of instruments.

I found it hard to feel sorry for myself. For the last year I'd been losing valuable pieces of my life like people lose bank cards. I felt lucky to be able to count the requisite number of limbs and body parts, let alone include personal possessions.

After having my kids taken from me, saying goodbye to a few guitars was like loose change dropping through a hole in your pocket.

I was sitting in the kitchen of my mother's house in South Shields - the very seat where I'd written so many songs in my youth. I was at the table I'd have been tapping on when Jason & the Scorchers convinced me to get off my arse and pursue my dreams. I picked up the one guitar I had left. A battered old acoustic that sat in my mother's cupboard, replete with four rusty strings that resolutely refused to snap with age. Surrounded by bottles of cheap Aldi Claret (a surprisingly tasty drop, actually) I hammered away at the thick top string, ranting away in drunken

indignation. I was as low as I could be. Yet I still had a roof over my head, a belly full of wine and a song to get me through the night.

I've often wondered about survival without song. How would I have dealt with my demons without the company of music to walk with me down some very lonely roads? Surely hopelessness would have been my companion had I not felt the friendship of my music? That same wretched hopelessness that wanted me dead. As bad as things got, music always made it better.

'The Drunken Lord of Everything' is one of those inebriated nuisances that keeps the whole neighbourhood awake at night by yelling out injustices from the street below. Pissed up and possessed by the very unfairness of it all. Still, it felt good to shout. If I'd stopped shouting I'd have given in to silence. Self-pitying silence. It's in that silence where defeat quietly resides. Just waiting.

### DRINKING IN THE DAYTIME

I was living back in the UK. I was broke but I had a lovely flat on loan from a cousin. It overlooked the River Tyne and brought me back to my roots. I'd organised a Japanese release for 'Valor Del Corazon' through Vinyl Junkie and got involved with the independent UK distributor Cargo. Now I needed to put together a band to promote the album. Things were happening quickly in cyberspace. Communication was the biggest benefit. By the time I returned home a new website was bringing people together from all corners of the globe. It was called Myspace.

Within weeks I had touched base with all manner of unlikely sources – from future love interests to semi-mythical characters from my youth. One name in particular – Bebe Buell – had enjoyed a place in my fantasies amongst the many stunning muses of '70s and '80s rock 'n' roll legends. Female characters that completed the patchwork of pictures adorning my wall and fueling my rock 'n' roll ambitions. Some of them were almost as famous as their musical partners. Bebe Buell was somewhere near the top.

She had been the beautiful inspiration of deities such as Steven Tyler, Todd Rundgren and Elvis Costello. Now she wanted to "befriend" me on this new social tool that my website guys had set up for me. Wow, thanks guys! I had a MySpace account for months, blissfully unaware that I could actually interact with people through it. Welcome to the future, Mr Ginger.

Within months, Bebe and I had become what was known in the pre-internet age as 'pen pals'. We were talking about putting on a show at the legendary Don Hill's club in NYC. Quickly shoving a band together, I accepted the offer with breathless glee.

Given a very modest budget, I figured we'd save money by using the American drummer that had recorded the songs on 'Valor Del Corazon'. Otherwise, Jase Edwards, Jon Poole and Conny Bloom were reliable players that could step up to the plate with a second's notice.

Things quickly morphed into the surreal once I met Bebe. She was older and stranger than I'd ever imagined. Quite oddly, she turned furious when a very pretty backing singer (who I'd also met on Myspace) and I developed a mutual attraction.

Once we'd become more intimately linked, Bebe made our stay in New York an unforgettable uncomfortable experience.

I was given strict instructions that under no circumstances was sexual fraternisation allowed between band members. I'd never been very good with rules but this was the first time I'd been given rules concerning my penis. In typically European fashion, my confused band and I sought solace in a bar to drink ourselves through this unique situation in preparation for the show that evening.

But I hadn't known that the drummer had neglected to learn the songs - nor had he remembered how complex the arrangements were. Soon - with the aid of a few drinks to stiffen his reserve - he would forget how to play drums entirely.

While a powerhouse in a studio environment, and very convincing in rehearsal, he had woefully little experience when it came to performing live. Or, indeed, daytime drinking. So, in front of a sold-out Don Hill's audience on a regretful Saturday night - during the intimidatingly complicated 'Drinking In The Daytime' - the very backbone of our band literally stopped playing his drums. We all turned to see him sat in frozen terror as if the audience were a phalanx of Formula 1 car headlights hurtling towards him.



up my acoustic – as I had thousands of times before - averting my gaze for one split second, I heard, “it’s okay daddy, I’m brushing my own teeth”.

Thinking he’d found an old toothbrush from a box of toiletries I was about to pack away, and was dipping it in bath water, I immediately dropped the guitar and spun around to the bathroom to stop him. He hadn’t picked up a toothbrush. He’d picked up a disposable razor. I walked in to see him with the razor in his mouth, blood pouring from his lips and down his chin. Whatever mortified expression that took over my face, shocked him to stone instantly. His proud smile instantly turned into abject terror as he began crying hysterically. He dropped the razor into the water. I grabbed his little body. I lay him on the couch swabbing the wound with a towel to ascertain the seriousness of the injury. The water had made the wound appear infinitely worse. Thankfully it was no more than a tiny scratch that healed up as soon as it was dry. It was barely even noticeable. He was fine.

Me? I was far from fine. So very, very far from fine. I held my little boy in my arms and I cried. And I cried. And I cried. I cried for all the years I had bottled up of the vicious brutality of my youth. I cried for the mess I had allowed my life to become. I cried until I was dehydrated and wracked with aching spasms of cramp. I cried for so long that by the time I had stopped, he was sleeping peacefully, protected in the arms that I swore would hold him every day of his life. Now that promise was broken. A new man would come along and do that job instead. And then I cried again.

#### **MY FRIEND THE ENEMY**

Once I’d moved back to living in the north east of England, I’d return to London as often as finances would allow. Living there again was out of the question, but every flush of radio plays or run of solo shows would bring in a PRS or publishing cheque that would pay for a train ticket. I was clean but struggling financially. I didn’t want the kids to know about my cash situation. So I’d invent games in the park that involved no money and scrape by enough pennies to buy them sweets and forego a meal for myself for that day.

One day whilst searching in a shop for any candy that met my budget, an unfamiliar female voice from behind called my name. On turning around I came face-to-face with an apparent stranger. Displaying neither features nor a demeanour that registered at all with me, this attractive lady persisted in her overly-familiar approach. “I’m sorry, but you’ve got the wrong person,” I said, beginning to move my kids away. It was then that she revealed herself. This was my old scoring partner. In the year since I’d last laid eyes on her, she’d had her absent teeth replaced, her children had returned to her and her previously skeletal frame had fleshed out. She looked happy.

Her skin was lightly tanned and healthy, her hair proudly boasted a silken sheen and her posture was upright and bold, a far cry from the forward-leaning junkie stance of addicts always on the move. She looked 20 years younger and resembled the haggard old crackhead I knew as much as I did.

“You look amazing,” she said in an unbroken voice that even danced with positive rhythm. I could barely respond. I didn’t need to, my shock at the transformation before me was comically evident. “I know...” she said, smiling at my speechless response, “...me too, right?”



'My Friend The Enemy' is the trigger that suddenly pulls you back into old thought patterns. The dealer that offers one more hit "for old times' sake". Or even bumping into an old scoring partner while out shopping with the kids. She didn't just look good, she looked alive, proud, rejuvenated and plugged back into the grid of nature from which she'd broken free many years ago. I recalled when we'd try to get phone change from a local shop and I looked so suspicious they wouldn't even let me through the door. I was reminded of times when my drug dealer refused to sell me drugs because he didn't want to give me what looked likely to be my final hit. I remembered endlessly waiting for dealers to turn up. When a fellow addict lifted their trouser leg to scratch their heroin itch, revealing a clean, white shinbone plainly visible through the front of their rotten skin. The sorry life I used to lead came flooding back in shocking waves.

Now we looked at each other – two ex-junkies who had made it through the ordeal alive, healthy and vibrant. Our children by our side. Seeing, in each other's reaction, just how far we'd come. Wondering how we'd even got so low in the first place. Or if anything would see us turning back to that world ever again.

#### **SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN**

Addiction free, with a freshly-mixed album being manufactured, I was back from the maw of madness. It hadn't been easy and it hadn't been pretty. The music contained



in 'Valor Del Corazon' was testament to that. It was an honest album – some might say confessionally so – but I had nothing to hide. I didn't want to come out of this looking like a hero. And I was no victim. I'd cordially invited every tragedy that took place on this fractured journey. This was my fuck-up, and that was the story.

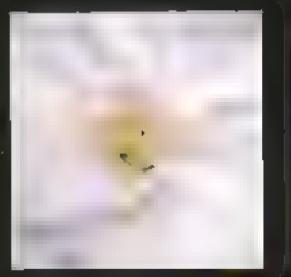
"Music will get you through times of no love better than love will get you through times of no music." I don't see how I would have made it through without music. When there was nothing, there was music. When I thought I'd die of sadness there was music. Since the album had become public property, I was told that it was even helping others through their own hardships and troubles. The honesty that I couldn't avoid had subsequently gone on to speak to other people. It spoke in as direct and straightforward a manner as their circumstances demanded.

The title of the album came to me in my sleep and woke me with a start. I'd been struggling for an appropriate album title for months and every idea I came up with seemed trite and throwaway. On being woken by the words 'Valor Del Corazon' (again, not the sound of the words, just large capital letters), I knew I had a title. I didn't feel it was my place to argue with it. Speaking no Spanish whatsoever, I didn't have a clue what it meant – or even why I was being given a Spanish title for my record at all. Looking it up in an online translation tool, I found it to mean 'courage of heart' – as well as price, or worth, or even cost, of heart. All of which stayed spookily true to the intentions of the music. The strength of my heart – the one constant that had got me through this ordeal.

It wasn't until the album's release that Spanish-speaking friends of mine would pull me up on my apparent mispronunciation of the phrase. Valor De Corazon would have read more correctly as strength of my heart, whereas Valor Del Corazon means strength, or courage of the heart in general. The purpose of the heart. The strength that exists within us all. This was even better!

This was my story, but ultimately it was a universal one. Like any story of faith, it exists to encourage others. To inspire them to believe in themselves. We all contain the strength to make it through anything – just as long as we don't stop believing in ourselves. It's within ourselves that the strength of the universe lives and it's always been this way. I had to reach the lowest point I possibly could in order to find the truth. Lies weaken the man, strength can only come from love and love from the truth. And this is as close to the meaning of life as I will ever need.

Where I will put  
together the Sonic  
Circus, meet  
Myspace, take lots  
of speed, accept  
defeat, have lots of  
sex, create incredible  
debt, record with  
heroes, run out of  
fantasies, take even  
more speed, meet  
Debbie and fall for  
the new oldest trick  
in the book.



## BLACK WINDOWS

Any break-up has three ugly inevitabilities. One partner's raw feelings, the other partner's emotional debilitation, and the vulturous delight of scavenging hordes waiting to take sides. I was unwittingly dragged into my ex-partners new sex life via the simple chore of picking up my children from their new home. Angie's current fella was casually slumped on the couch watching football.

A disinterested "hey" was the full extent of our introduction. It was awkward. At this point whilst still celibate, still bleeding inside, still living in hope, this introduction connected like a building being swung at me. It was all I could do to compose myself – for the kids' benefit. Dreading the moment when I'd drop them off again, only to witness this guy pissing out his territory again.

Sometimes there wouldn't even be a brutally dismissive greeting. Just a text saying, "we'll be back soon". So I'd sit in the house awaiting their return from a joyous supermarket jaunt. Where I imagined they gaily skipped along brightly-lit aisles with day-glo colours trailing behind their steps and tunes following their laughter. I was certain. I pictured their Disney-themed escapades while I languished in my own Ken Loach de-saturation. Awaiting Angie's return from wherever her and her new fella were cavorting while both children were tuckered out and asleep on the couch. I surveyed the painful indications of someone having moved on without me. An unfamiliar shirt drying on a radiator here, a magazine aimed at men there. In barbarous realism I took in every painful detail. Then I spied a laptop. A laptop still switched on.

I went to log out of the open page to launch the net browser so I could kill some time online. At least that was my intention. But even the most honest intentions – with all the will in the world – can be easily thwarted by unexpected distractions. I saw a conversation – replete with a full thread of previous discussions – about the private life of my increasingly obvious ex. And as unexpected distractions go, this one was irresistible. Of course, I shouldn't have looked. I should have closed the laptop and let my imagination fill in the blanks. The false imagery I'd have invented would have faded – as it tends to do. Reading this would only tattoo the memory onto me, into me, forever. So I began to read. And read. And read.

Needless to say, it soon became apparent that only one of us was living in hope of getting back with the other. I closed the laptop, picked my freshly-vomited heart up from the carpet, waited for the return of the family and left that house with one intention. Fuck reconciliations, I intended to pursue my life with about as much virtue as Caligula.

## WHEN SHE COMES

Once I was fully re-integrated into my northern heritage – a rough landing but a nice new flat – I realised I'd explored celibacy as far as any sane person needed. So I began a very determined year-long plan of laying roots, planting seeds and ploughing pastures new. I planned to copulate with a force equal to that of the hatred coursing through my body. It was like drinking Dr Jekyll's serum. Two protruding horns were forming on my forehead and the growth of a tail emanated from my

arse. Or that's how I felt, anyway. The hate felt good. Friendly. Certainly more life-affirming than the pining of an abandoned dog - a state I'd been in for too long.

I developed a spectacular appetite for speed. Huge bags of wet mulch that smelled like the rotten feet of a tour bus full of drummers. I became a bona-fide, sleep-deprived, gum-receding speed freak. I also became a whore. I spent the next year fucking anything that would fuck me back. Which, as I discovered, was a fair amount of people. My flat was a bachelor palace. A wooden veranda overlooked the languid motion of the Tyne estuary.

Still, I was an amphetamine-booster turbo maniac, so at least the apartment was spotlessly tidy. It was full of booze and complemented with large French windows in the bedroom. There was hardly reason to leave the bed. So most of the time we didn't. The speed made me as horny as a teenage novice and with a supply of emergency viagra handy, I maintained the will no matter how many ways were presented. I was sourcing girls on Myspace and simply inviting them over for the weekend. Every weekend. Terrifyingly, very few turned down the offer. From wrestlers to models, thrills were derived as varied as the company. Two girls in a bed would be an arrangement I encouraged at every opportunity.

Thanks to multiple bank loans, an evergreen budget covered the libido-loosening properties of cocaine. At least regularly enough to indulge my fantasies to the hilt.

I'd drive from Gateshead to London just to take part in a multi-girl romp. Then I'd drive all the way home before morning - my moustache and beard heavy with the flowery fragrance of vagina.

The title of the album 'Yoni' (Hindi meaning vulva) came simply from my fondness, at the time, for vaginas of all shapes and sizes. I wasn't even addicted to sexual intercourse; I'd often be happy enough to make women come and consider the evening complete. Without getting too graphic, I was obsessed with female sexual pleasure. Being the gleeful provider of it was a task I heartily relished.

I even began recording the orgasms of willing participants. Far from exploitative, I don't remember anyone turning down this request - even when they were informed that their groans of pleasure might make it onto my new album. Which they did. It would be ungentlemanly to reveal which lady's rapturous moans made it onto this song, but theirs was without the doubt the most melodic. I smile thinking back to the arguments at the studio. Producer Tim Smith was dead against featuring the audio of a woman at orgasm. The very idea disgusted and embarrassed him. Personally I couldn't think of a prettier sound. I guess you had to have been there.

## HOLIDAY

There was a girl I was convinced I'd marry if I were to ever enter into such an arrangement - which I absolutely wasn't. My chaotic life left no room for such commitment. But I liked the idea of liking the idea. And when I thought of matrimony, it was her face that came to mind. This would, of course, change with inspiringly dramatic fashion (see 'Say It With Herpes' in the next chapter).

'Holiday' was inspired one miserable Christmas and New Year alone. I watched the rain lash against my windows as if it was some kind of personal vendetta. I picked up the phone and asked her if she'd ever been to Rome.

Within 24 hours we were boarding a flight to a destination neither of us had ever visited. A thoroughly magical long weekend was spent doing everything that a young couple should do in Rome. Our minds were shattered by the staggering Sistine Chapel. We pounded the streets until our feet pleaded for death. We consumed as much sublime food and wine as our systems could tolerate. We fucked a lot. Sex with her was near perfect. But then many things appear picture-perfect when desire is manning the paintbrush. Life in general was a cyclone of amphetamine-driven bliss. But it suited me.

I was happy, and I think it's most noticeable in this song. I'd gathered together an impromptu band - The Sonic Circus - that clicked with supernatural ease. Cargo were willing to offer a recording advance as a sign of pure faith. We would be able to get the band out on tour and tighten them up as a devastating live unit and then capture the magic at Tim Smith's new home studio for our debut album, 'Yoni'.

What could possibly go wrong?

#### **SMILE IN DENTAL**

This song featured a satisfying set of lyrics that were written on that fateful clean-up trip to Manila - when everything I knew to be true changed drastically. From floor to ceiling, stern to bow, top to fucking toe, life turned disturbingly unfamiliar. I was lost. I didn't know what side of my body my arse was on. I wore the shock like a garish comedy mask.

Angie was always better at hiding her feelings than I. Most people were, for that matter. My poker face was like an emotionally-transparent exoskeleton. Hiding things felt like lying for me and lying took way too much effort. I didn't have the stomach or the memory for it. Quite frankly, I couldn't be arsed.

I'd kept these lyrics on the back burner, waiting for the right musical idea with which to marry them together. Once rehearsals began with the new band, I confidently felt that I was beginning to connect the dots. But good ideas can often be confused with optimism. Wishful thinking with a head full of speed? Might as well get your hair cut in a fairground hall of mirrors. Cruel tradition wasn't done with me. Tradition had taken note of my new found confidence and was having none of it. Good fortune was duly sucked from each and every situation.

Self-belief kept me afloat. It was this same self-belief that would offer jobs to unknowns. A chance for someone new to shine. It enabled me to offer the kind of opportunities I was never given. I'd willingly dish out positions to the under-experienced just to see if they'd come up trumps. Why not? We were all winging it as far as I was concerned.

On this occasion I had cast a local promoter as tour manager and chief of finance. We would also set up the release of 'Valor Del Corazon' together. A sweet girl with an open and appealing face whose eagerness was infectious, fresh and alluring.

When we first set eyes on each other at an acoustic show she'd booked for me, I was instantly struck by her helpfulness - in every department.

"Shall I pay you now?" she asked, before soundcheck had even begun. A very rare occurrence.

"Can I kiss you first?" I asked.

"Okay then."

With that, I developed a great fondness for Sammy Andrews. It would eventually turn sour but then ultimately - thankfully - back to a great fondness that continues to build with each passing day of our friendship. Sammy remains one of my absolute favourite people in the world.

With typically haphazard baby steps, we were ready to take this wonderfully mismatched bunch out on the road. Contrasting characters like the classically-trained Ralph Bossingham - a saxophonist who had never before set foot on a tour bus - who'd get to rub shoulders with a rap artist named Tanisjah - who had never heard heavy rock music before. I'd finally got as close to the sonic social experiment I'd intended to try out with Eureka five years earlier. This was going to be an unexpected success or a catastrophic cavalcade - either way I had a hunger for the uncertainty of it all. I also had a huge bag of speed, an excitable libido and nothing to lose. Still, the uncertainty was what I really lived for. It's what I still live for; the thrill of the unknown. If there's no way of gaining an outcome without trying something first - with a good team - then count me in. Every time. There's gold in them there hills.

#### JAKE

The most emotionally-stripped and brazenly honest song I've ever written. It was with great trepidation that I presented this song for the album. Thematically it certainly didn't fit. But I was striving for veracity - preparing to go naked in public. This degree of honesty was never going to be pleasant.

I'm so very proud of this song. The accuracy of emotional impact to which I'd aspired, the lyrics squarely hitting the target for which I'd aimed. Albeit squeamishly, I nailed it all with this one - whether the listener wanted it or not.

Which they largely didn't.

Why would they? I'm not ashamed to say that this level of candour is purely for the artist's benefit. Neither am I ashamed to be one of those wankers that uses the term artist. If you invest yourself completely into your own personal form of expression, regardless of reaction or ridicule, then you are an artist in my eyes.

It is still a song that I can't play to myself. I can't even listen to it. I tried singing it a few times at acoustic gigs, but would find myself bawling hopelessly by the first chorus. I could attempt this song every night for the rest of my life and the wound will still be too raw for comfort. I was broken by bitter loneliness, crippled by utter helplessness and unable to see a time when the mention of my eldest son's name wouldn't see me reduced to pulp.

Obviously Jake is now a fine young man with his own band that have supported at my shows – leaving me almost too proud to breathe. Enough water has passed under newly-built bridges to scrub clean any ill will. In the wake of domestic upheaval and family division, you develop methods of coping. Otherwise the hurt would eventually stop your heart from beating. But the memory of this wretched time will never be far enough away. Some things just hurt so much that the pain becomes part of who you are.

### THE NIGHT I WAS BORN AGAIN

With the band just one tour deep into world tyranny, rehearsals for the album began. The first challenge we confronted was the intense and complex rhythms between Jon Poole and the Sonic Circus drummer Steve Spring. A session player by trade, Steve came very highly recommended by more than a few friends. Powering our good ship, after a dozen shows he and Jon (both huge Frank Zappa fans) had devised arrangements so complicated that I sensed my punk credentials being monitored by the jazz police.

While they counted out algebraic constructs of beats and bars, I'd simply wing it using natural feel and eye contact. And not a little luck. It worked. We'd combined our collective styles and produced something so musically peacockish it seemed to be on a mission to eliminate the colour grey.

A swindler by comparison, I too paraded with head held aloft. For a while, at least, but long enough to enjoy the view. That was until reality swiped the rug from under my dancing feet. The bounce in my step was hobbled by the news that Steve Spring was leaving the band. Less than a week before going into the studio, he'd decided we weren't paying him enough. Poetically shit timing for such self-valued talent.

Assumed financial worth was hardly relevant at this point. There was no money. This was simply a chance to get an album recorded and get back out on the road again. In fact money hadn't even entered my mind – somewhat naively, I now accept. I still believed that bands recorded music for the purpose of, well, recording music. A grand tradition. A hallowed club to which years of practice would grant you entry.

Okay, so this was an independent band with a microscopic recording budget, but even Tim Smith was happy to work for a massive pay cut. And if a genius like Tim understood the situation, surely that mattered?

Word got round that Steve had left the band because of financial disputes. Classic stuff. If dissent could be contracted like a common cold, soon other band members became infected. They contagiously complained they too were earning less than their worth. I wasn't even aware that people in bands expected to get paid for recording. Making albums – creating music set in stone for eternity – was still a privilege for me. To me, working with great people sufficed as a wage packet. One thing glaringly apparent was the misuse of the word band: a collective term for a musical group. A team of people working harmoniously for the good of the unit. The gang in the movie that played on as the ship slowly sank. But hoisting an indie protest banner in the face of an imaginary bank? This didn't smack of concern for the good of any unit – other than monetary ones.

The disillusion was hauntingly familiar. I returned to my Gateshead bachelor pad and asked around if anyone knew a good drummer. And quick. The name Dean Pearson was thrown into the ring, and after a 15-minute jam session in someone's kitchen a timely reminder of inspirational musical passion – two things became obvious:

1. I'd found a new drummer.
2. This was going to be a solo album.

Within a few days, Denzel (as Dean had previously been known and as I immediately started calling him), had achieved the seemingly impossible. He'd learned every migraine-inducing poly-rhythm that Steve Spring had come up with. Within days he was making a noise with Jon Poole as devastating and exciting as Entwistle and Moon. So there we were. In the studio recording my second solo album.

To be honest, being in a band really can be a pointless and frustrating task. Just ask anyone who does the lion's share of the work in their group. Being at the mercy of musicians who don't write their own music – yet make it unpleasant to play your own? Sounds ridiculous, right? It is. I'd been in this position before and didn't want such a counter-productive approach to affect a fresh recording session. Not again. After all, why should I? Just because we weren't enjoying a huge recording advance? Working with a tiny budget was demeaning enough, but at least I had the comfort of knowing that most of my favourite bands had recorded in similar situations. If small budgets ever stopped music being made, my record collection would be a fraction of what it is now.

I am a musician. I love to make music. I love to work with great musicians who love to make music too. If we get paid then justice has been served – hallelujah. But to refuse to play great music with great musicians on monetary grounds? Listen mate, if money dictates whether or not you play your instrument, then you're little more than a Pop Idol contestant. Nothing wrong with either in my opinion. Nothing wrong at all. Just don't get the two confused.

### **WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE NORMAL ALL THE TIME?**

Wanna hear some more stories of financial woes? Of course you don't. So let's keep it brief. By the time we'd returned home from the first and last Sonic Circus tour, an enormous and ugly beast of a topic reared its indisputably enormous and ugly head. That was the gross misappropriation and mishandling of funds. Regardless of how deep we buried our heads into a mound of amphetamines, this monster was always going to find us. It knew where we lived. Even if it didn't, it could have just followed the glittering trail of debt.

We had overspent by a very impressive margin indeed. I've never been one to shy away from a good time, damning the torpedoes with the best of them. But this was a shock even for me. We'd been paying for a tour bus, we'd been paying for hotels to sleep in. We'd also been paying for the tour bus – full of empty beds – to park outside of each hotel we slept in. On top of this admittedly admirable exercise in '70s excess, we were averaging a rough headcount of just 150 audience members per night. Add up the financial expenditure of our nine-piece band, the road crew, special guest Tim Smith, special guests the Psycho Cyborgs, and you've got trouble.

Underlining the word ‘trouble’, let’s not forget the Psycho Cyborgs were performers who enjoyed sticking metal spikes through their own bodies for fun. Every night they’d leave the stage covered head to foot in their own blood. The sort of people who enjoy pain like we enjoy masturbation. Certainly not the kind of people it’s wise to get on the wrong side of.

Leaving aside inevitable additional costs (typical touring expenses incurred), we realised it looked unlikely that we’d be seeing anything approaching a profit from this tour. Quite the opposite. This little jaunt was going to make a record-breaking loss – the likes of which I hadn’t seen since the AC/DC tour debacle of 1996. We were going to come home almost £60,000 in the hole. For which someone was going to have to pay. And I had a good idea it would be the fella whose face reluctantly ended up on the posters.

Let’s face it: the guy holding the microphone makes for the most convenient target. The buck has to stop somewhere and in this cut-throat industry it’s the band leader who takes it for the team. Band leaders either get flattened by this tank or they turn into one. By the time the nausea subsided, a plan was drawn up to get every single person involved in this tour paid in full. I’d start with the people I knew had not been paid. The performers. The others I wouldn’t find out about until I attempted to book another bus or try to get some more shirts printed. We owed so much money to so many people we made Detroit look like Vegas. And in a business that had long since ran out of respect for me, my name had just turned from mud to straight-up shit.

The only way I knew how to make money – at least legally – was to play acoustic shows. I was going to claw my way back to a position where people trusted me. I was going to earn back my respect with hard work and a bigger picture in mind.

So, from 2007 until 2008 I played acoustic shows everywhere I could get a booking. I used all of the money generated to pay back the debts left over from the Ginger And The Sonic Circus tour. Every last person. Every last debt. Eventually – without paying myself one single cent beyond food and rent – within a year I’d paid up and made good with everyone who had previously spat at the very mention of my name. It was a fucking awful time but something inside told me to stay honourable and I’d benefit in the long game. Through every gig and every bank transfer, one line from the movie *A Bug’s Life* kept playing over and again. “The first rule of leadership: everything is your fault”.

After over a year of paying back countless tour debts and without a single penny to my name, Ralph Jezzard decided that I owed him £30,000 for the recording of ‘Valor Del Corazon’. A fee that I didn’t even know he was expecting. After all, I’d just finished paying back Pedernales studios – who were in danger of closing – where we’d recorded the album. I honestly thought Ralph was making my album for fun and that we’d share any profits from its release. But there were no profits. Only debts. The mess was creating more mess with every sweep of the broom.

### CAN’T DRINK YOU PRETTY

Back when I was cutting my teeth in the world of music, I’d keep a fantasy to-do list. Some things on the list were dreams within the realms of possibility, like “owning a BC Rich guitar”, or “writing a 10 minute song”. Then there were the curveballs

unlikely to ever happen, like “meet Bebe Buell” and “find out what Tim Smith and Olga sound like singing together”.

I’d been a Toy Dolls fan since getting my first band – Zig Zag – into our first rehearsal. It was above a notorious blood ‘n’ sawdust pub called The City Of Durham at the old South Shields market place. We were managed by my wonderful uncle David. We would set up in a disused room that even the rats avoided for fear of contamination. It was here that our guitar player – Johnna – played me the first Toy Dolls album. I instantly loved them. My fascination for this most eccentric of punk bands followed me until I heard the even more unconventional Cardiacs. Their singer sounded curiously similar to Olga of The Toy Dolls. How funny it would be to hear them singing a song together?

Almost 20 years later and I was in the studio of Cardiacs frontman Tim Smith. He and Olga were stood around a microphone learning the lyrics to ‘Can’t Drink You Pretty’. I’m about to hit ‘record’ and I hear another line from my original to-do list manifest into audio life. But the effect was unexpected. Their voices sounded so indistinguishable that they morphed and cancelled each other out. I double-tracked together that nasal vocal for which they’re both famous. It fattened the sound and created the equivalent of a quite normal-sounding vocalist. They de-weirded each other out! Another fantasy that was way more fun in my head...

As is my tendency, I’d become obsessed with another band. The Toadies (from Texas, a kind of heavier version of the Pixies). By the power of the internet I was able to contact their amazing vocalist Vaden Todd Lewis who graciously accepted the invite to sing on a couple of songs, ‘Can’t Drink You Pretty’ included. To date, Vaden Todd Lewis has yet to provide a bill for his services. Some musicians deserve the pedestal you place them on – believe it.

With all this teamwork going on, plus the chance to actually get to play lead guitar with Jase Edwards and Olga, the feel-good factor was off the scale on this song. You can hear the smiles in the music. It’s not – as I’ve been accused – a misogynist song about pulling girls at a bar. It’s about how ugly a poisonous personality can be even if someone has a pretty face. “Your beauty is only skin deep, but your ugliness goes the whole way through”.

As a liberal socialist, being accused of misogyny is a strange insult to swallow – like being called homophobic or racist. Although, as someone who assumes natural intelligence in people, I guess you could rightfully call me stupid.

#### **THIS BED IS ON FIRE**

This song was written about one of the fun ladies I’d hang out with. I loved girls who thought nothing of jumping into bed with a couple of cute mates to entertain my fertile imagination. One girl in particular was exceptionally fun in such situations. If it was in my fantasy bank, she could arrange it. Which proved to have a disconcerting and unexpected effect.

As you might imagine, for people whose jobs leave a lot of time alone to entertain themselves, a healthy stock of imaginary sexual situations, un-Godly deeds and unlikely scenarios can provide important company on lonely nights. Especially for

musicians involved in healthy relationships. It's for the best that those guys have plenty of reserve funding in the treasury of onanism.

So it was with a disappointing clout that I discovered the reality of fantasy. Once carried out in real life, fantasies simply evaporated from the wank bank. Every sordid act I carried out ceased being a fantasy. I'd soon discover that too much choice isn't always a good thing. After one year of celibacy, I spent the next year withdrawing funds from the wank bank until I'd spent every teenage wet dream and lived out every implausible sexual liaison. The sad fact is that the execution of anything is often far less stimulating than the concept itself. I had all the freedom in the world and was beginning to realise that sexual freedom is very overrated.

I slept rarely, spoilt myself constantly and generally lived out the kind of lifestyle of which most men dream. I had bank loans amounting to twice the amount of the bank loans I was supposedly paying off with the current loan. I didn't give the slightest hint of a fuck. I was a snorting, drinking, sexual animal with all the choice in the world, on a tight budget and no long-term expectancies.

But the entire scope of my imagination was tiny compared to my lack of accountability. I was living out a fantasy and about to hit the earth like a collapsing tower block. On the afternoon that my own sister called me a whore, I realised the game was up. This was all a lie. A very elaborate, fun and naughty lie, but this wasn't me. What I really secretly dreamed of was boring old stability. I wanted purpose. I wanted value. What I really wanted was a partner. And where better to find an actual real-life girlfriend than on Myspace?

#### **SAVE ME**

Originally written about a girl I'd met in Japan. A sweet American model with the kind of shape that was designed to have songs written about. While a perfectly lovely young lady – of whom I was very fond at the time – I'd been seduced more by this melody than its inspiration. I felt that the sentiment befitted deeper and more substantial subject matter. I was positive I'd found it.

It must have taken me six months to trawl through the exhaustive list of Myspace friend applications alone. From hairy old rockers to fresh-faced devotees, it was a joy to 'virtually' meet the very people who were listening to my music. Within this inventory of admirers was a stream of nubile young strangers more than happy to jump on a train to Newcastle to hang out with an apparent rock star. Myspace allowed me to virtually shop for people.

But then there was Debbie. Debbie was different. The daughter of a country singer, this Texan-born beauty had long silken hair the colour of American autumn. A pearly white smile that contained approximately ten more teeth than an English one, full lips that looked like they'd never been kissed and eyes that sparkled like the future. My future. I'd never get tired of looking in those eyes. So fascinating was this unique colour that it even appeared to change from a brown to a green hue in different photos.

Hang on – change from green to brown? The sharper of you can already sense where this story is going.

By now the world had seen a movie called *Catfish*. It's a film about a guy lured into an elaborately woven fabrication by a lonely old fruitcake with little more in her life than a broadband connection. But this story regrettably predates that movie by four years. Debbie had built an incredibly plausible story, to say the least. She'd set up a page for her ailing father - a little-known Country & Western star - whose own page was full of aged and authentic recordings and pictures. Mostly of him with a baby Debbie on his knee. And still the penny looked in no danger of dropping anytime soon. Her own photo section contained dozens of shots of an obviously very popular girl, surrounded by friends in a variety of joyous social situations. Admired by all? That's my gal. I certainly admired her. Especially once we started enjoying phone sex, that soft southern US accent taking hold of any remaining doubt, rolling it in eiderdown and sending it off to frolic in the clouds with the butterflies. She sounded like Dolly Parton - as I always imagined my soul mate would. Even when people around me - no let me rephrase that - even when fucking everyone around me warned me of the idiot I was about to make of myself, I steadfastly continued to march on in blissful ignorance. Love was not only blind in this instance, but it was also deaf, stupid and lonely. And it wanted to marry a girl from Myspace called Debbie.

### WENDY, YOU'RE KILLING ME

The album was turning into a fanboy dream. Guitar legends Bernie Tormé and Warner E. Hodges duked it out while Tim Smith scored elaborate string quartet sections. My financial crisis barely entered my concerns. In fact I had no concerns.

Even the dormant arachnophobia I'd suffered from as a kid was cured at Tim Smith's place, by sleeping in a room full of spiders hanging down like gothic Christmas decorations. The minuscule budget didn't put me off for a second, either. I felt like the musical equivalent of Ed Wood. I was independent, broke and proud. I had a credit card.

I was also steadily weaning myself off a gluttonous diet of fresh sexual conquests. I was trying to get over Angie and expecting to cultivate magic with my mysterious internet love, Debbie.

Okay, cyber-sex didn't count. Surely? I was being as honourable as distance and technology would allow, but I was cramming so much speed into my system that I needed sexual outlets on tap. Internet sex was fun, simple and guilt free. I didn't even question why the pictures and videos of other girls were so clear compared to Debbie's dark, fuzzy, barely visible attempts. But surely that was nitpicking? I mean, give the girl a break. Despite having the photography skills of a cavewoman, Debbie had been generously rewarded in the looks department.

I was writing songs about other girls, like the one in the title of this song. While a good title is a good title, I was thinking of only one girl. Plotting how we could get together. Even arranging to borrow enough money from the bank to get her a ticket over to Britain. Just one little issue to overcome first: she had no passport. But apart from the passport dilemma, the shitty photography, the inability to operate a video camera (and the fact that her photos kept getting lost in the mail), just what was everyone's damn problem with Debbie?

Then the day came when Tim Smith - a man whose celestial sincerity genuinely

set him apart from all living people – took me to one side. He leant tenderly towards me and engaged concerned eye contact.

In his wonderfully gentle voice, he earnestly said, “Ginger, yer making a cunt of yourself”.

### SIBERIAN ANGEL

‘Siberian Angel’ was a track I’d of earmarked for myself, being well within my vocal range and style. But after sending a few songs to Toadles singer Vaden Todd Lewis, he singled out this song as his favourite and requested taking the lead. It was impossible to argue about who had the greater vocal abilities: Vaden was a fucking powerhouse. Still, if I’m being greedy, I will say that I wish I’d sang this one myself. I was still angry with Angie – now soundly embedded in her new relationship. We still bickered and sniped at each other. I was hatefully envious of her new man. She considered my career to be on the skids and that I should settle down and cobble pennies together from acoustic shows. “No one cares about your silly little albums any more, Ginger,” she’d assure me.

It was hard to argue with that one. Had I not been so stubborn, I might have taken it to heart. But yes, she did have a point. No one in the industry saw much value in my worth. Thankfully, the industry was a faceless myth that didn’t represent everyone. It still favoured cheekbones over skills. Angie had given me something to fight for – or at least, something to fight against.

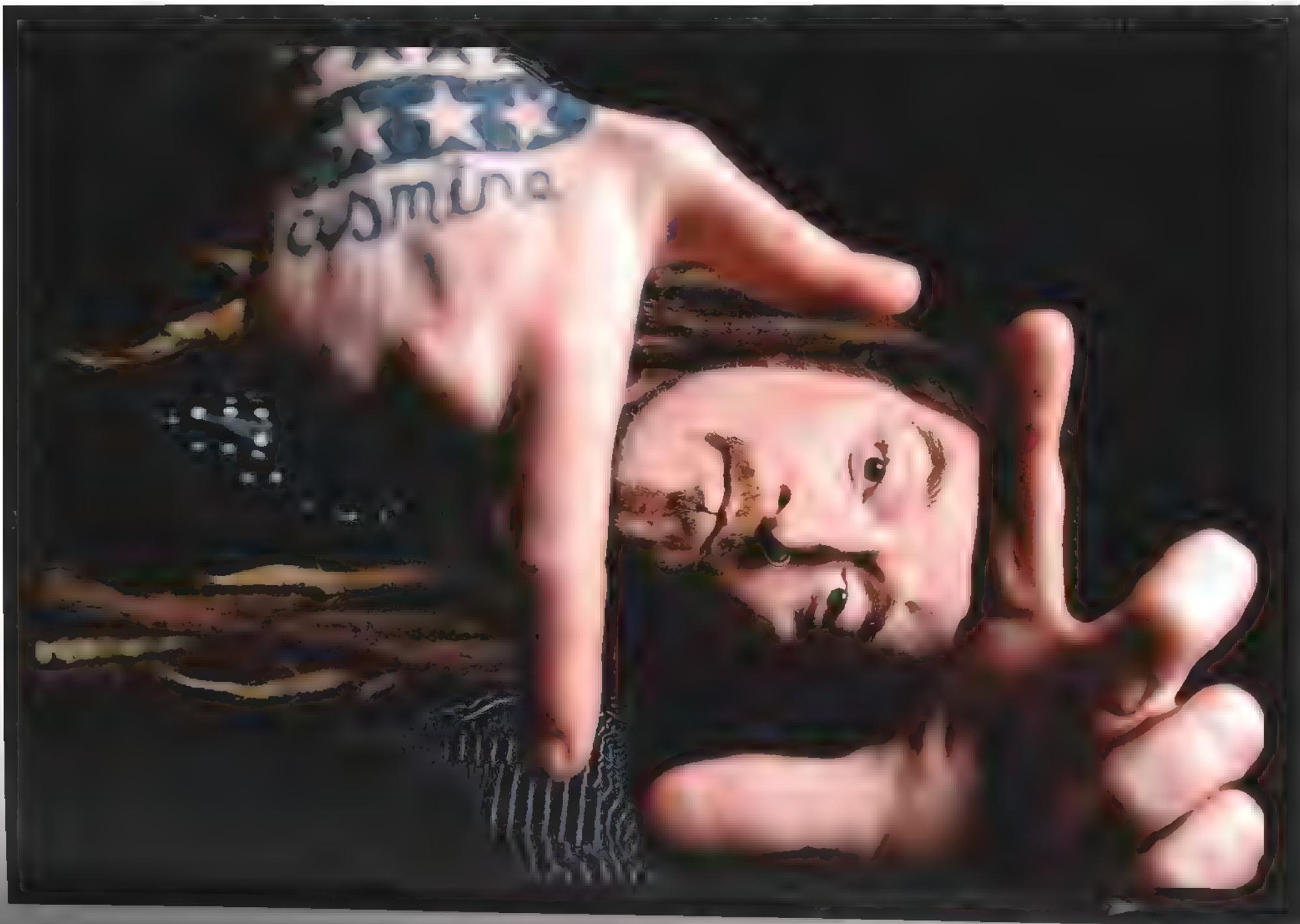
One day Jase Edwards said to me casually, “Ginger, you just don’t acknowledge that things might not be possible, do you?”

This is how he saw me? I wasn’t aware that anyone even noticed let alone appreciated my tenacity. It was simply my nature to cling onto a bone with my teeth until it was mine. Still, without this lovely comment from Jase, I can’t say I’d have found the resolve to continue digging for moisture in this dried-up lake for much longer. Let alone expected to find enough water to sail my dreams and ambitions on.

I will say this now: without Jase Edwards, Tim Smith and John Dryland of Cargo Records (and even Angie’s painful dismissal), you wouldn’t be reading this book.

Like so many musicians at the time I’d have probably cashed in my chips, accepted defeat and palmed myself off as a manager. As most did. I don’t recall anyone actually succeeding by running towards that particular light of opportunity. As popular a pastime as it seemed. There wasn’t really a light at all. It was simply so dark in this corner that freedom from the struggle seemed to supply a faint glimmer of relief. Certainly enough to look attractive in comparison. The truth was that most of my favourite bands, musicians, artists, actors and spiritual inspirations had a fundamental relationship with struggle. And they fought on despite the hardship. The struggle was part of the deal, no one argued and no one could complain. There was always someone who’d beg for such problems over theirs.

On ‘Yoni’, my musical heroes had not only inspired me but had even come to my rescue. They helped me continue by taking part in my “little album”. They reinforced my belief that there was more to rocking like a righteous motherfucker





CHAPTER TWELVE:  
HOWLING WILLIE CUNT  
WORLD OF FILTH

WHERE I WILL  
RELOCATE TO SPAIN,  
INVENT A HIDEOUS  
ALTER EGO, BE CLEARED  
OF HERPES, GET DISMISSED  
BY THE UK'S COUNTRY &  
WESTERN SOCIETY AND  
ATTEMPT SOMETHING  
DESIGNED TO OFFEND  
EVERYONE.



Most drunken conversations – however brilliant never leave the pub table. Quite rightly so. What appears to be an undiscovered height of comedy genius might – in the harsh light of day – prove otherwise. Me? I take drunken conversations and book shows with them. I design merchandise with them. I form bands with them. Very occasionally, I record whole albums with them. Usually someone armed with more sense will talk me back to earth and point me towards a more orderly direction. But in the case of John Dryland and Cargo Records – who funded the project – they found the idea hilarious. Not as hilarious as Ralph Jezzard and I did though – of this I have little doubt. Let me explain.

Ralph and I were on a hopeless trek to Spain in an attempt to write a new Wildhearts album. We spent what was intended to be a week of hard toil in a luxury apartment (owned by my Uncle David) getting as wasted as humanly possible. One morning – on our daily trip to the local supermarket to ravage the alcohol section – we came up with the concept of a drunken fucked-up old country singer; the unfortunately-named William Cunt. By the time we reached the store, we'd invented a story where young William had been jailed. While serving his time, he'd been named Howling William Cunt. No-one knew why. No-one asked. But the name stuck.

Known in his local drinking establishments as something of a crooner, he was picked up by a small Nashville label. The renamed Howling Willie Cunt endured a fruitless career, alternating between recording studios and penitentiaries. So far, the story had simply made a dull walk more satisfying than usual. Then we began to think up song titles. By the time we started filling up the trolley with liquor, I was on the floor of the supermarket in aching fits of laughter. Whilst eyed with suspicion and concern by Spanish shoppers.

All day long the titles came – some funnier than others. By the time I got back to England, I picked up my guitar and started to write. Within a few days I had most of the album roughly drawn out. By the end of the week I had a producer, a studio and a whole team of professional country musicians booked to receive some demos and record an album. I couldn't quite believe this ridiculous idea was strolling into life, spurs a'janglin'. But I couldn't fight it. This shit was hilarious.

I quickly lassoed Jase Edwards to record the demos. What I hadn't taken into consideration was the touchiness of the country and western brigade and how tightly they clutched their beloved genre to their true blue-collared chests. On hearing our demos, the first to pull out of the project was the producer. He then called each musician individually and had them blacklist me from any future work. Finally, the studio called to tell me they wouldn't be seeing my name in their client book any time in God's glorious future. It appeared that writing dirty words to a country soundtrack is tantamount to smearing a shit moustache under the nose of the Pope during the Papal Audience.

Jase and I looked at each other. We had a problem. We'd never recorded a country album before. We knew no country musicians. We still had time to run away before the cheque had been cashed. Trouble was, neither of us were very good at running away from a challenge.

## 5,000,000 WAYS TO KILL YOUR BABY

First things first: we needed a studio that we could book within a week's notice. Somewhere owned by someone who'd see the funny side. It was a funny album, no two ways about it. Okay, at times it gets way too offensive, granted. When faced with anything extreme I've never been very good at reining it in. Drugs, alcohol, travel, sex, pop videos, whatever you've got. Put me in charge and I'm going to push the boundaries. Who did we know who even understood the theory of extremity?

Tim Smith, of course.

Once we played Tim the demos and he'd stopped laughing, he was in. He had a free week but we'd have to begin tomorrow. Christ, we'd have to get a band together quickly if we were going to pull this off.

"Denzel, have you ever played Country?"

"No."

"Fuck. Can you learn?"

With that, Denzel stuck his drums in the back of his Dad's car and listened to Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings from Newcastle to Salisbury. I'd play bass and guitar, Jase would play some guitar, Vix Fuzzbox would sing vocals. The rest of the musicians needed to make this ridiculous project sonically authentic were found in the local listings of live country bands. Evidently unaware of the recent black mark against my name in the C&W studio network. With sheer determination, we assembled a collection of shit-kicking musicians from Stourbridge to Stonehenge.

Glenn Buglass - a thespian friend of Jase - and I would help assimilate a booming, fucked-up voice that we based around Kenny Rogers. The strangest thing is that Kenny Rogers' voice - when scientifically disassembled - resonated in three very notable tones at once. A warm fuzzy tone, a wheezy rattle and a croak that barely registered, yet resonated in a way that gave him that earth-shuddering Kenny Rogers baritone. By copying all three tones and mixing them together, we created a trailer-trash Rogers. I can say with total honesty that I've never enjoyed a vocal session as much in my life. We laughed more than we sang. Given that we had mere days to finish, we sang a lot. We had plenty of speed, so staying awake to sing was no trouble at all. The laughter, on the other hand, would soon become a problem all on its own.

The humour obviously isn't to everyone's taste. In fact most people would find it downright offensive. I accept that. But some of the humour was unfairly dismissed as puerile and simply intending to shock. While no doubt intending to provoke a reaction, some of the lyrics on this album are fucking hilarious. '5,000,000 Ways To Kill Your Baby' being a noteworthy case in point. There's some funny fucking words right there.

### A LIL' BIT 'O GRAVY

Yes, the laughter often threatened to call the whole game off. We had to obtain authentic performances from some of the genre's top live performers. We targeted them for their live reputation - and the improbability of having heard about my new bad reputation within the guild of country session musicians.

First problem: how to get the musicians to play without them hearing the singer. One solution we used was to ask them to play instrumentally, shouting "chorus coming now," usually with sterling enough results. I mean, these cats could play.

But every now and again, the sharper players would notice a vocal line - from our many, many vocal tracks - accidentally left in after a 48-hour straight run.

"Hey, turn up that vocal," they'd request.

This where we'd have to come up with excuses - on the spot - as to why we couldn't carry out their request.

"This vocal take is so out of tune, it affects the instrumentation."

"The singer sang from memory, so there are no lyric sheets."

"This vocal was recorded live with an acoustic guitar, which is playing the wrong chords."

After a while we excelled at the lies. For the most part, no-one made much of a fuss and played on. One amazing character though - the late and very much missed Dick Decent - did take umbrage at having to play piano to a vocalist he couldn't hear. During his performance on a song about how to get your dog to enthusiastically lick your testicles, in his delightfully Brummie brogue, Dick stated, "Well it's bloody 'ard to play when you dawn't knaaw wot he's bloody singing about. He could be gooin' on abaast 'aving sex with 'is dog for all ol knaaw!"

At which point, the studio completely lost their collective shit. We were in hysterics. We cracked up with the uncontrollable laughter of children forbidden to giggle in class. The game was up, one of the musicians had smelled a rat and it was fess-up time. Technically, the song was about having sex with a dog, sporting the chorus "A lil' bit o' gravy helps the dog lick my balls". Dick - Decent by name and decent by nature - simply replied, "Well, woi didn't yaw fookin' tell me?" and joined in the laughter.

Dick stayed on for the entire session, and after that continued to play piano with me until his untimely death in 2012. An amazing character who refused to wear shoes and socks, in rain or snow, whether carrying heavy flight cases or explaining to bouncers - successfully I might add - that there is no policy disallowing people entry into clubs for lack of footwear. Everyone loved Dick Decent. There isn't a day goes by that I don't think about him and smile.

## YOUR HEART BELONGS TO JESUS, BUT YOUR ASS BELONGS TO ME

A gospel ballad based around anal sex and the ownership of a body part traditionally unassociated with fulfillment by the Lord. Admittedly a little close to the truth among the well-documented cases of sexual deviation within the Catholic Church, but I'm sure that God herself would probably chuckle at this one. In fact, if God did exist then I'm pretty sure they would have a better sense of humour than their fan club.

I'm also pretty certain it was this song that the original team of producer and musicians heard first, taking enough offence to abandon the project. In fact while conducting research for this book, this is the only song that cannot be found anywhere on online – not a full version anyway. For this album, that really is quite a feat. Any mention of the Lord obviously puts a joke in a special box of sin.

### HAVE IT WITH HERPES

Back in Spain, chuckling to myself as more ridiculous song titles entered the increasingly perverse radar, I decided to ring one of the girls I'd been seeing. A lovely girl and someone with whom I was always very fond of chatting. She was fucking furious.

"You've got a fucking nerve, haven't you?"

Not only had I never heard this girl angry before, but I honestly had no idea from where the fury stemmed. I'd been honest with all the recent ladies in my life. I'd just been thrown out of one serious relationship; the last thing I wanted was to enter into another. Some were cool with that and stayed. Others weren't so keen but still bade me a fond adieu. It was all very amicable. The furious girl on the other end of the line seemed cool with it. Or so I thought...

"You gave me herpes, you fucking cunt!"

With irate accusations blasting into my right ear, I panic-listed the amount of people I'd have to inform immediately. The list seemed formidable. But first things first, I'd hang up, find a private doctor and get a test. Like, right the fuck now. Luckily in Spain (with my Uncle David's contacts), such a test could be performed with the results delivered while I waited. Before the sun went down that day, my test showed that I was not – nor had I ever been – the owner of herpes. I'd never even had a cold sore.

I won't go into my particular sexual fantasies, but I didn't usually go in for conventional sex when experimenting with strangers. The names of those I'd had traditional intercourse with – since Angie – I could count on one hand. Still, I had no idea if herpes could be contracted via other orifices, so I contacted all my bedroom partners and warned them to have tests taken anyway – just in case. Every one of them did and every one of their tests came back negative.

It turns out that the accusations from my ex-fuck buddy would have been better aimed at a clean-cut fellow with whom she'd been cultivating the virus in my absence. Typically, she'd assumed that a six-foot rock musician with dreadlocks, tattoos and a dodgy background was the bad guy. An easy mistake to make if you're the type

to judge by appearance (or the type that doesn't apologise for wrongly accusing someone of giving you the clap). Either way, the truth was much more mundane.

Far from being a filthy virus spreader, I was merely working on making a filthy new album. And she'd unwittingly given me a killer new idea for a song.

### DARLING IN THE GARDEN

Say what you like about the dubious content - many did - there are still some great little tunes on this album. I'd probably perform them live if I could find a band to play them. Guess I should be thankful for small mercies then. But I will confess that I often think about turning these songs into a musical. How hilarious would that be? Something that gets banned after just one performance. And you know what happens when I get stupid ideas...

### HOMOSEXUAL PUNCHBAG IN A WHEELCHAIR

I think this is the very title that put me into convulsions in that Spanish supermarket. As offensive as toasting marshmallows on a burning old folks' home it may be, but it still boasts a pretty sharp set of lyrics. Which - if featured on *South Park* or *Family Guy* - would meet microscopic opposition. Like I've said, too many people are too touchy. That ain't my problem.

Reminding people that it's just a joke sometimes seems a waste of good air, misspent communication. Like trying to talk a hole into a stone. It's a matter of taste. While a lot of people want to be hand-fed baby food with a clean spoon, others live by the three-second rule. Me? I eat food that lives on the floor and I don't get sick. I don't mind people who like tame comedy but fail to understand why the agreement doesn't extend in the opposite direction. As Robin Williams once said, "joke 'em if they can't take a fuck".

### NINE COLOURED SPASTICS ON A MEAT HOOK

Another case in point. So obviously and utterly ridiculous that I challenge anyone to find actual offence within this song. Go on, check. What is being directly disrespected here? It's a fucking joke!

A joke in bad taste? Undoubtedly - but without a fragment of malicious intent within its phoney immorality. Too much outrage within society is down to simply too many things being taken out of context. The same policy applies to the mindless support of attention-grabbing, socio-political ramblings of celebrities on promotional campaigns to sell a new product. Rich people spouting off into the media that rich people are the cause of the plight of poor people? Pass the fucking sick bag. José Mujica - the President of Uruguay - donated 90% of his income to charity. Ninety fucking per cent! Now that is a guy I'd believe. But have you ever seen his face splashed all over Facebook? I bet you don't even know what he looks like.

A lazy public are easily encouraged to distraction by the media, so the media manipulates them into reacting instead of thinking. It keeps lazy people busy. Thinking is potentially dangerous, it could get in the way of order. Keep 'em sitting on their arses and keep 'em dreaming that they're creating awareness by reposting

another grinning celebrity con-artist going off about corporations being evil on a social media site controlled by corporate funding and brought to you by the Apple corporation.

### I'D RATHER HAVE A DICK IN MY ASS THAN HAVE YOU IN MY HEART

A hearty attempt at dumbing down to Olympian levels of stupidity and wilfully crossing those lines again. Man, crossing lines was something I'd attack with such zeal that Nike should have sponsored me.

I was the guy who'd have a line of cocaine before laying my head down for the night just to see if it would spice up the dreams a little. I was the guy who smoked cocaine mixed with ammonia because crack wasn't strong enough. I was the guy who booked the most haunted castle in Britain to record in, and to sleep in the most haunted room of it for inspiration (a story we'll come to a bit later). I'd be told I couldn't do something and I wouldn't even waste time in asking why before trying it out.

While not essentially a clever man, I'd say I'm smart enough to know that there's always another level of cretinism yet to be plumbed. Still, to be fair, we weren't far from bedrock...

### THE HAND OF A CHILD

Houston, we've hit bedrock. The very base. The day when the laughter stopped. The song that – whilst writing this book – I can't even listen to now. So for this track, I will work purely from memory. Quite a feat considering I'd previously erased all memory of this song.

Actually, I won't. All I will say is that it was inevitable. We had to go there. If we were to attempt to locate the last word in bad taste, we held the map. We knew exactly where the nadir was situated. It was more a case of get it done and move on. I'm not sure some of us fully recovered.

### GOIN' HOME TO SATAN

As a final word on this disgraceful album, I will leave you with the most nonsensical of admissions. The line "they're skinning lawmen with broken glass" was originally "they're skinning children with broken glass". We agreed to change it on the basis that skinning children in the fires of hell was going too far. That this would be too upsetting. And we wouldn't want to upset anyone listening to this album, would we?



Where I will be  
ripped off for a  
fortune, reform  
The Wildhearts,  
crash another car,  
almost get mistaken  
for a rapist,  
meet my online  
lover, record in  
a haunted castle  
and kiss my  
future wife.





## ROOTING FOR THE BAD GUY

Before heading off to Spain to write a new Wildhearts album, I'd been debating putting together a Wildhearts show. I was planning on working with Andrew Roberts – a seemingly affable character – who had organised a few solo shows for me by running a modest booking agency. The event became Scarborough's Rock In The Castle. Officially the coldest concert ever held, it was also hands down winner of the worst organised event in history. It even made national news. Andrew Roberts had sold over 5,000 tickets and laid on just one single bar – which resulted in something approximating the largest queue in history.

The funniest thing about this debacle was that the show was to be held on top of a coastal cliff in the coldest, windiest September on record. Which caused the entire stage to be blown from its moorings and into the sea just the day before. The worst part was that Mr Roberts had neglected to pay any of the bands – including Terrorvision and The Eighties Matchbox B-Line Disaster. Instead he opted to do a runner with whatever cash was made from the event.

As disappointing and frustrating as the experience proved, two pertinent points were revealed. Firstly, that I had missed playing with the band, and secondly that Danny was in a far worse physical condition than anyone could have predicted. Usually a live wire onstage, he was thoroughly exhausted even when rooted to the spot. If there was going to be a Wildhearts reformation, there was no way it would have worked dragging him along. We could give Danny some time to recover – months, maybe years – but for now we needed a stand-in.

I'd already written 'The Queen Of Leaving' with Scott Sorry, for 'Market Harbour' – my planned third solo album. We'd already begun work on it at Tim Smith's studio. In fact I'd written a ton of stuff with Scott at the ranch in Malibu and experienced a supernatural musical closeness that I'd never felt with anyone before.

In an incredibly prolific period I'd also written an album's worth of Wildhearts songs and demoed them with Jase Edwards. They were all basic five-minute ideas. Then I appealed to Ritch and CJ to listen and learn the songs as they were. I'd also sent the songs to Scott. I was planning on bringing him over from LA where together we'd expand the songs into voluminous epics, like 'Rooting For The Bad Guy'. CJ and Scott had met on The Wildhearts/Amen tour. Ritch met Scott the evening before going into the rehearsal studio. I hoped they'd get along.

## THE SWEETEST SONG

So the band set up in a London rehearsal studio and started work on elaborating the tunes. Things started to click immediately. In fact considering the hard work everyone put into the songs, I'd credit the songwriting to The Wildhearts – whereas normally it would just say Ginger. This was my open handed gesture to let the guys know that I wanted a gang and not just a backing band.

"The Sweetest Song" was one of the nastier lyrics from a very hate-filled songwriter wired to the mains on amphetamine and composed through clenched teeth. Screaming would be the only thing slowing me down when writing such lyrics. I meant every single word. I wanted to kill someone. I'd come close before. Like

when a known heroin buddy of Danny's - a character forbidden access to our band in any shape or guise - had been seen hanging around at a Bulldog Bash event before I'd arrived. I felt this same fury and informed the Hell's Angels to keep him close by until I got to the site. Whereupon I dragged him into a tent and - with unrequested assistance from the Angels - administered one of the heaviest beatings ever meted out to someone who lived afterwards. I heard that he put a contract out on me to be killed. He would die of a heroin overdose before it was carried out. It's terrifying to look back at the intensity of my rage back then - it all feels so different now. But it's still in me - in there somewhere - beaten down by years of control. Yet when writing this song and through some of the recording, it was there for all to see.

### THE HARD WAY

A song about touring, but much more than that. Being in a band is a team or a lie. And I can't stand lies. We'd hastily arranged the song then literally loaded up the gear and headed across to another part of London to record the drums. Then we were ready to travel to a rented house just outside of Ipswich to record guitars.

Why Ipswich? I have little idea, but my assistant at the time, the lovely Lex, had managed to find us the perfect place to live and record. It was such a remote house that it met both budget and noise allowance. Managing the band myself meant I could enjoy less traditional methods of recording. It sure made things more fun than being stuck in a studio for a month.

The very day we arrived in Ipswich was the day that a local serial rapist started making the national news. People were afraid to leave their houses. An orange alert was on, and every cop in Ipswich was out to find this predator.

Meanwhile, my good friend Trace was suffering with cancer. Someone I'd known since being a young rock 'n' roller with dreams of leaving the North East, Trace was a close friend. But she was also someone with whom I'd enjoyed the occasional tryst. Her little boy once crept into bed with us and pissed all over me - sealing our intimacy forever. I loved Trace. She wasn't just the life and soul of the party, Trace was the party. During the recording of the album, she passed away.

I had left the session to attend the funeral. I offered Jane - Danny's ex-girlfriend - a lift to the service. Jane was also a good friend of Trace. She was also someone we'd all known for years. Whether having to look after our bass player whilst in rehab, or being brought to Japan to keep him almost handcuffed to her so he'd make the shows, Jane was someone everyone loved. So we were often dismayed and heartbroken at the treatment she'd receive from our bandmate.

She had, very sensibly, left Danny some time before and I couldn't have been happier for her. She deserved better. Hell, anyone deserved better. We were party buddies, the last ones awake when everyone else had collapsed. She was a diamond. Heart of gold. Everyone thought so. Driving Jane to Trace's funeral was almost as heart-breaking as the funeral itself. I was almost glad when it was over and I could leave. It wasn't until the drive back to the studio that the grief hit me and I allowed myself to cry.

I was on the wagon to get in shape for a show planned for 'The Wildhearts before Scottie left for home. Wracked with grief, once I got back to the studio all sober intentions

were thrown to the crows. Walking into our rented studio house, I announced, "I'm going to the store for alcohol - who's coming with me?" Typically it would be Scott that would be up for an adventure and he jumped into the car. I drove faster and faster down the country lane, sorrow and anguish steering the vehicle. But sorrow and anguish are really shitty drivers and the car went careening off the road at around 100mph. We ploughed right through a clump of trees - somehow missing every single one - and landed nose-first on the opposite side of an embankment in a field. The car was a spectacularly crumpled write-off.

Scott being Scott - the guy with whom I'd shared the haunted ranch in Malibu - and I simply dusted ourselves off and walked back up the long hill in the dark. We entered the house and said in unison, "Jase, will you go and buy us some vodka?"

### **THE NEW FLESH**

The next day we had to report the car crash. It was just as well: once at the police station, we realised the police wouldn't require a manhunt to search for those responsible for the crash. We were in a small town of maybe a few hundred gossips; we made for good conversation. It was already bizarre enough to imagine there was a serial rapist still at large. In this quiet farming community village, incidents other than cows giving birth were rare. Now there was a rapist on the loose and a dramatic car crash in the same week. Hey, hold on a minute...!

The oxygen was instantly sucked from the tiny police station. The doors suddenly locked. The officer stood motionless, probably imagining his name plastered the front of every newspaper in the UK for catching the rapist. Or possibly rapists. Instant promotion from the desk job. He eyed us up and down in abject silence, a scene of which Sergio Leone would have been proud to direct. Then - with an almost disappointed sigh - we heard the door unlock. We patiently weren't wanted rapists. Counting the sheer amount of scars, tattoos and dreadlocks - identification giveaways that would surely have made a police report at some point in this investigation - he meekly gave the order to "get out of here".

'The New Flesh' was written as an anti-single. Twisting barbed and raging lyrics with pretty tunes became the theme of the album. This song seemed perfect for a single seeing how radio objected only to four-letter-words - providing the chorus appeared soon enough. But you'd have to be the type of person who ignores actual words to miss the humour and the point.

So it was with great irony that Charlie Simpson reviewed it. The ex-member of bouncy boy-band Busted - now reinvented as a serious metal musician in Fightstar - reviewed the song on a critics' chart show. He said something like, "The Wildhearts are trying too hard to be mainstream". Laugh? I almost dropped my needle.

### **SHE'S ALL THAT**

One day I woke up to speak to Jake. I called him regularly just to let him know that daddy was still there for him. Maybe I'd even be back with him some day? He was six and sometimes so excited to hear from me that he barely made audible sense. It was that lovely gibberish at which six-year olds excel. On this day he was excited

about attending a wedding. After attempting to decipher some details from the garbled enthusiasm, I finally wrestled free the truth; he was attending his mother's wedding. Angie was getting married. I had no idea. It looked like I wouldn't be back with him some day, after all.

It also looked like the wagon I was planning on climbing back onto after wrecking the car was gonna have to leave without me. I wouldn't be getting clean and sober after all. In fact, if there is technically a polar opposite term for the very concept of clean and sober, I was going to get that, instead. It was my birthday soon and my liver had already begun rehearsing for the party. And what a party. Friends travelled from all over to come and celebrate in Ipswich - of all places - with me, for days. We began partying. I stopped several months later.

'She's All That' was already written about Angie. It was based on the Tim McGraw song 'She'll Have You Back'. Fortunately it was written before finding out the matrimonial news from a six-year-old child. Otherwise I imagine the lyrics would have been a bit more caustic.

### THE REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED

As we laid down the guitars in the nice, warm, big house, Scott sat huddled in a small shed next door with a tiny heater. He was learning old Wildhearts tracks for the forthcoming show we had booked. I wanted to make the band some money. But I didn't want some manager grubbing 20% from the top for a bunch of ideas that were mine in the first place. As had largely been the case in the past - and as would continue to be the case in years to come.

I planned to hire a hall in Wolverhampton and do the show without an agent - we'd just have a friend arrange the details. This friend - Gav - had been closely linked with Andrew Roberts - the crook who ran away with the performers' funds after the Scarborough castle show. I didn't know Gav too well but he was the boyfriend of my assistant Lex. So if he was good enough for her, then I'd take a chance on him. Lex was royalty in my eyes. Still is.

As Scott patiently learned every complex riff and awkward time sequence, all I had on my mind was drinking away all memory of Angie. I was also hoping that my Myspace darling - Debbie - would turn out to be everything I needed to fill the ever-widening emotional hole. It was a long shot, but it was my last bullet. The flight was booked, the passport secured. All that was left was for fate to deal me a hand with which I could work. A lot was riding on this game.

I knew Scott would be a major help in writing 'The Revolution Will Be Televised'. The chord sequence for the final section of the song - the part that goes live in the video - was all Scott's work. I loved that sequence and that scene in the video. In fact I loved this whole era of the band; making this album, without a manager, but feeling like we were a team again. For me, this was the essence of The Wildhearts. Doing exactly what the fuck we wanted to do. Such as booking haunted castles to lay down vocals, for example.

"Lex, can you find me the most haunted castle in Britain?"

## SLAUGHTERED AUTHORS

There was little that Lex couldn't do. Finding a haunted castle would be no different. But first, let's take a break from recording. We were in a room at Asylum rehearsal studios in Birmingham preparing for the upcoming show. It would be Scott's live debut and I wanted everyone in the sold out venue to see what I knew: that he was the perfect successor - should one be needed - for Danny, who seemed to be someone who didn't want to do anything anymore. Scott, on the other hand, wanted to donate every single fibre of his person to that stage, to that show, to that crowd and to the band. I knew the fans were going to love him.

So while the band rehearsed songs that we'd been playing for years (and Scott had known for days), a flight was landing at Birmingham airport, fresh from Texas. It was carrying a person whom I was banking on breathing passion back into my crushed heart. The much-abused organ began showing vital signs of life - both emotionally and chemically - as I waited in arrivals for someone who I only knew by photos of their face. I'd assumed her height and I imagined how she'd be dressed. I'd pictured the embrace enough times to predict the smell of her hair.

I stood scouring the features of the disembarking travellers. Every face that remotely resembled hers immediately registered as a passing stranger. I waited. I knew I'd recognise her when I saw her. I'd just know. Eventually, every passenger had arrived and left. A message on came over the airport's public address system.

"David Walls... could a David Walls please make himself known to security immediately".

Dread fought with confusion as I nervously located a telephone. I discovered that Debbie had entered the country without a forwarding address nor contact details for her stay in UK. Once I'd successfully identified myself as her host, she was granted passage and entry into Birmingham. Into my arms. Into my life. It was a rough start but it would be okay.

I watched casually as two security guards guided an old woman who was rushing through the gates. I waited to finally meet Debbie. Slightly concerned that someone who looked so frail should be running, I wondered if maybe the old woman was trying to evade arrest. None of my business, of course, but certainly something to laugh about when Debbie gets here.

The woman ran straight to me. Her hair was so thin that her scalp was visible through her thin grey/ginger hair. She was around four foot tall. Joey Ramone spectacles. Dry, pasty skin that looked like it had just been introduced to daylight after years underground. Just as I was about to make my apologies and tell this odd lady that I was expecting someone, I heard the most familiar voice escape her dry lips.

"Ginger! It's meeee!"

Nothing made sense. Time slowed to a stop. All feeling in my body disappeared.

I hugged this woman ever so lightly, feeling every jutting rib in her scrawny back under my fingers. I taxied her in silence to the hotel I had booked for us to stay

before returning back to rehearsal.

I didn't need to say a word to the guys. They knew by my shocked expression that something was very wrong indeed. Once I told them the story, I think it was Scott that held the laughter in with least success. After the room erupted in the type of laughter that heals the sick, the questions began to fly.

"How did she expect to get away with this?"

"Where is she now?"

And, most crucially, "what the fuck are you going to do with her?!"

We had a show that evening; there wasn't enough time to arrange for her to leave.

I called my mother and asked for the biggest favour of my life. So for all of that day, plus most of the evening, my mother and my Aunt Dorothy looked after this person who resembled her photographs less than any living being on the planet. With help from my family, I got through the show. I can't even remember if the show was good or bad. I was numb from the soul down.

At the aftershow, Debbie tried to surgically attach herself to me. She sincerely believed that I had fallen for her online impersonation and that we were going to waltz into the moonlight. I tried every way I could to talk my way out of returning back to the hotel. But as the crowd began to slowly dwindle, panic set in. Then I spotted Jane.

"JAAAAAAAANNNEEE".

I'd never been more relieved to see anyone. Jane was always up for an all-night party. She could stand the pace and she was generous enough to take pity on my bizarre predicament. She had attended the show with her friend Helen. Between us we could go back to my hotel, party all night and the next day we'd get this... this... I wasn't even sure what her fucking name was... back to Birmingham airport and back to wherever the hell she came from.

That night we ingested so much gloriously mind-numbing alcohol that frequent visits to a local all-night Indian store - happy to sell us alcohol around the clock - were made.

"I'LL COME!!" said the strange-looking woman on the bed.

"No, no, no, it's far too dangerous out there," we'd reply. And with that we'd escape from the room.

"Jane, what the fuck am I going to do?" I pleaded as we walked the cold street.

"Don't panic, me and Helen will stay here all night, you won't be left alone. Just don't panic. It'll all work itself out".





Typical Jane, always calm. Even when she was as drunk as me. Still, falling asleep wasn't an option.

Talk, drink, snort, talk, drink, snort, talk, drink, snort. The endless night eventually dragged itself to sunrise. I was going to make it. Just one final liquor run and we'd be sorted until the ordeal was over and the weirdo was gone. As we travelled back up the lift for the third time with the bags full of alcoholic supplies at our sides, I thought how, once again, Jane had acted with total selfless dedication to ensure that someone was taken care of.

I'd never noticed, in all the years I'd known her, that this really was her personality. She was the carer. The shoulder people cried on. The person that picked up casualties from the floor and saw them into taxis. But she was the ex-girlfriend of a band member. Verboten territory. I'd never even noticed her as being sexually attractive, she was just cool and funny and cute.

Then I looked into her kind green-blue eyes and realised that all along we'd been given the shit ends of very similar sticks. In unhappy situations due to unsuitable partners and cursed with a loyalty that forced us to stay. We were the ones that didn't even expect happiness, let alone demand it. Suddenly, for a second, those kind green-blue eyes seemed just as lost and confused as mine. Here we were, the ones that were always alone. Alone together.

And then we kissed.

### INNER CITY OVERTURE

Debbie – or whatever her name was – eventually returned home after a few days of police investigation (on both sides of the pond) and general legal confusion all round. No one had yet dealt with a case like this.

I accepted she would have to return to my house in Gateshead or be left alone in London. Basic decency dictated that I couldn't leave her in a position of danger. Regardless of how unhinged she obviously was. My mother and I then took her directly to Newcastle airport where we sat with police and security and refused to move until she was on a plane headed for the USA. It worked.

A few days later I got a call from her mother. She accused me of criminally misleading her daughter – conning her into a romantic situation which this clearly wasn't. I couldn't even deny the charges. I was as guilty of being an idiot as 'Debbie' was of being a liar. Eventually her mother threw illumination onto the magnitude of the situation. A dim light clearing all further discussion on the subject.

*"If she is pregnant then you have to marry her!"*

Never having held much belief in the Bible – let alone the logic of immaculate conception I was confident that this would be the last I'd be hearing from this insane bunch of Texan weirdos.

Now I had the unenviable task of locating the real-life girl whose image had been plagiarised, who might be further used to lure the unexpected, the lonely – and the

dowright stupid – into similar fates. As it transpired, there were two girls being exploited. One was quickly identified with the help of two amazing American fans

I met on the Darkness tour. They tracked her down using a picture of her wearing a fraternity ring.

The second girl took a week of intensive investigation on my part. I dissected every picture I had. I tracked down every friend in every shot, friends of friends in the countless photographs I owned. Eventually I found a young girl who was about to be married. In a life of strange occurrences, this was the strangest feeling I'd known. To have to tell this girl that someone had used her image to fool me into falling in love with her. Probably other men too. She was naturally shocked – not to mention disturbed – but genuinely sorry that this could happen to someone. She seemed as nice as the person 'Debbie' had pretended to be. It was beyond bizarre to say goodbye to her, knowing this very familiar face was a stranger who had no idea who I was.

'Debbie' would continue to get in touch, using pictures of other girls. I'd continue to report her to the police and this went on for months. Truth is, I'd got to know her so well, I knew every slight inflection in her writing style that would appear in subsequent messages until she eventually tired of me and moved on. Ironically she moved on to people I knew and was able to warn of the dangers.

#### **DESTROY ALL MONSTERS**

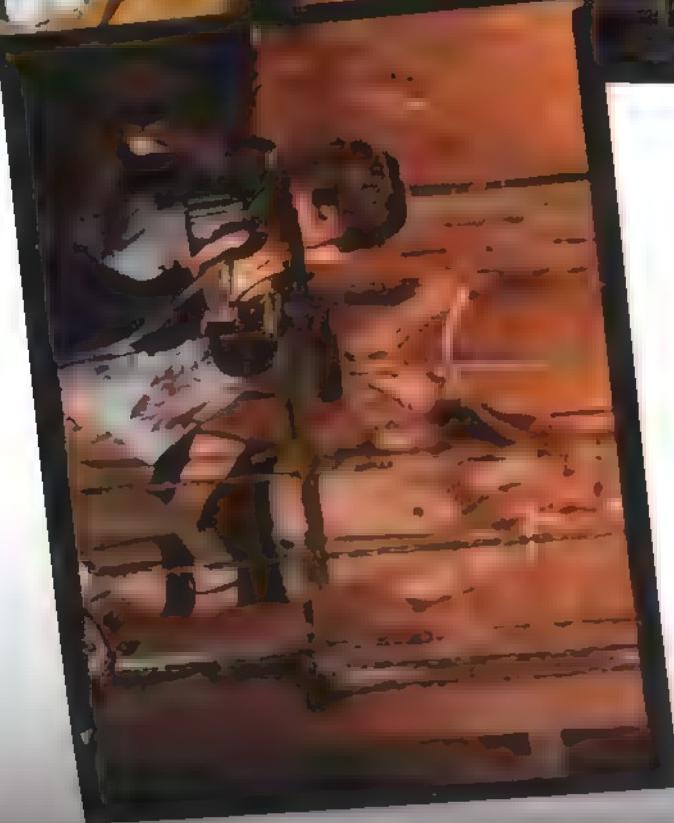
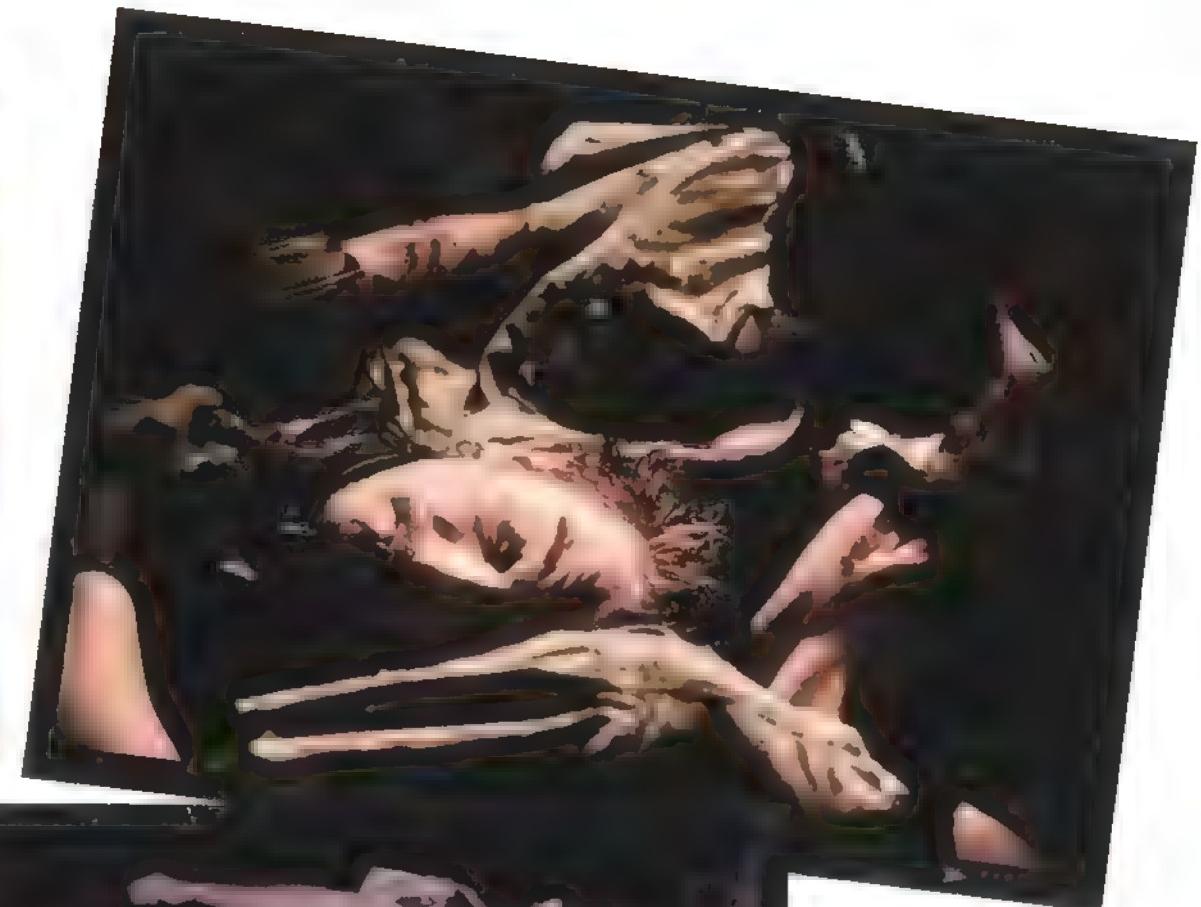
Now, where were we? Oh yeah: "Lex, can you find me the most haunted castle in Britain?"

So I found myself holding the keys to Tutbury Castle in Burton-on-Trent where we recorded vocals for the album. A place with a history so rich in hauntings that the King's master bedroom was closed off from the public. But it was reopened on request. By me. This would be the room that I would sleep in. Jane, every bit as adventurous as I, would also occasionally join me. I was intent on getting the most out of this experience. And where better than in the most haunted room of the most haunted castle in Britain?

Scott had already returned to USA. Typically, Fitch was finished the day after his drums were recorded. Actually that's not strictly true – he would later show up in the final days of mixing to adjust the bass guitar. And, for me, ruin the much heavier mix I'd had intended for the entire album. In fact, 'Destroy All Monsters' is the only song that retains the original sonic blueprint I had for the whole album. So imagine every song sounding like this and you're close to what was in my head.

CJ was present at the castle but had lost his voice. Without much help in the vocal department, it was down to me, Jase and whoever we could rope in to do backing vocals. CJ rasped out what he could in the limited range that met his ailing vocal cords. There was no way this album was leaving this castle unfinished.

We worked through the day, we worked through the night. We also partied through the night, searching for ghosts and signs of paranormal activity. I wanted this album finished but I also wanted to find evidence of ghosts. But even in the King's bedroom



- supposedly haunted to the hilt - the most supernatural thing about it was the lack of any weirdness at all.

"Ah, that's because the noise of the music is warding them off" said the gatekeeper. With more of a classic Monty Python delivery than he could have possibly imagined.

"You mean, the ghosts of these slain kings and fearless warriors who fought to the death with swords and spears? They're scared of my Gibson Les Paul?" I asked.

"Oh yes, they don't like loud noises".

There was one minor incident after I'd been warned that one of the ghosts was a little girl. Jane and I hadn't consummated our union. She was more virtuous than to allow our first coition to take place on the dusty floor of an old castle. She visited occasionally, but mainly as a friend. Consumed with constant speed-induced horn, I settled for a quick wank in the bathroom. Although I had no doubt that it was my imagination, I couldn't commit myself to the act with the thought of a little girl's ghost possibly floating through the wall.

But that was about as ghostly as it got. I saw or felt absolutely nothing abnormal or even remotely scary the entire week we were there. I'd record vocal take after vocal take. I had to act as both backing vocalist and lead voice. The vocal booth was hastily constructed in an area that one of the girls claimed to have seen a child's hand reaching around a door. I can honestly say that I've felt more of a shudder singing onstage into microphones that I'd known Casey Chaos had previously used.

In fact I'd go as far to say that recording in this supposedly haunted castle eliminated any previous belief I had of ghosts, ghouls or unexplainable bumps in the night. These days I just don't believe in ghosts at all. I've never felt even the slightest twinge of weirdness in the darkest places I've visited since - which disappoints me beyond words. Still, I would heartily recommend that everyone owns the keys to a castle for a week at least once in their lives.

### BI-POLAR BABY

A title conceived in obvious parody but questionable taste. I wasn't claiming that any of the women in my life up until this point had suffered from bipolarity (or manic depression, as it was previously known), nor indeed any clinical mental illness. But like the Ramones before me, I always felt that as someone who suffered from mental illness that I was allowed to take the subject lightly.

The truth is, I have a lifetime of experience in actual mental health problems. I have a knowledge of depression beyond the understanding of any doctor I've ever met - presumably because they haven't suffered from depression. I'm familiar enough with the subject to state that names and terms for degrees and variations on this complex illness are about as useful a guide as a nickname is for getting through Canadian customs.

However, the production of this album had certainly had been littered with examples of female eccentricity. For that, I thank them. Their unique irregularities

both healthy and unhealthy – helped in the writing, the performance and the very colour and shape of this album. Without Angie leaving, I'd never have fallen for a Myspace oddball. Without whom, I would have never ended up sharing intimacy in an elevator with Jane. With whom I now have a beautiful son and share a wonderful life. She is my lover, my best friend and my manager.

If you stick with it, every situation is a catalyst to something unpredictable and amazing. Some of the worst setbacks in my life have – without doubt – turned out better than I could have ever hoped. Even more so than if they had gone to plan in the first place.

In fact, on the subject of mental health, the main reason I haven't committed suicide is because I believe the natural state of any situation to be change. Whether it be the greatest time ever or being face-to-face with a deranged love pariah from a social media site, everything has, does, and will change. The cost of change is unknowable and the future is none of your business. So you might as well relax, accept it and try to take some pictures along the way.

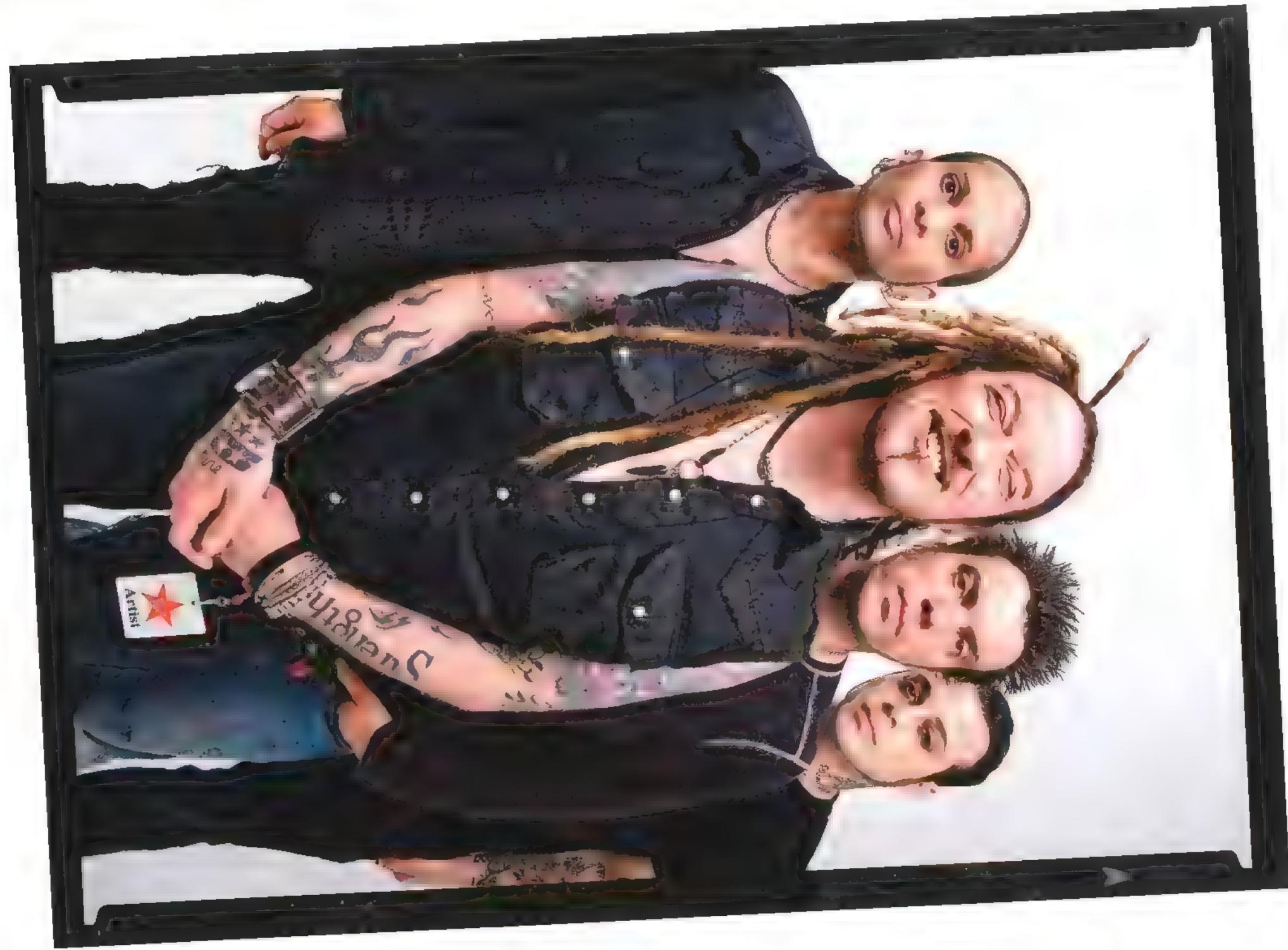
The Wildhearts album was finished. The job had been performed with fun, joy and excitement. From the car crashes and crime of Ipswich, to the supposedly haunted bedrooms of Tutbury Castle, we'd assembled a stellar band line-up and made one of the best albums of our career.

The reviews would testify that the group hadn't sounded as vital since our debut. It was hard to argue. We'd seen too much to be easily conned. We'd been beaten enough times to take a punch and stay standing. We ate chaos and shit defiance.

We knew who we were in the same way that a manager never could. Previous managers attempted to steer the ship into calm and easy eddies. But HMS Wildheart would erratically spin into ever-decreasing circles of fortune until ultimately we'd be stranded, forced to bail out and swim to shore.

A manager couldn't possibly understand that chaos fed us like hungry dogs. It was that underdog status that gave us our edge, separated us from mainstream fodder and created something far more unique. We didn't need management. Together we were unstoppable.

So what did we do next? Yep, we decided to get a manager.







CHAPTER THIRTEEN BY  
THE WILDHEARTS  
THE B-SIDES

## SO THE SPENCERS CAN POKE OUT

A piece of fun based on one of the many instrumental sections from 'Rooting For The Bad Guy'. In fact I believe Jase Edwards came up with the original idea and we all dug in to make it work as a band composition. As far as I know, this only appeared as a Japanese bonus track.

The title was something CJ came up with when devising compatible guitar tones. He was attempting to stay as free of distortion as possible, "so that the spaces can poke out". I think I loved the title 'So The Spencers Can Poke Out' before there was any intention of turning this into a track.

## OH, BONITA

Aside from a few amendments - mainly for comedy value - this song is based on a true story. One day I'd see a toothbrush, then I'd discover clothes on the floor and finally, it was a case of either get rid of her (sweet thing that she was) or move her in. Although I wasn't intimately linked with anyone specifically, I certainly didn't want any girls finding another pair of panties under the bed. I retained at least that much class. Anyway, from the simplest of pleasures things soon got complicated - as most sexually active single men will testify. Someone had to get hurt. In fact, at times hurt felt like an unwanted pet passed around from owner-to-owner. Classically, the person who brought it around in the first place ended up living with it.

I'm not a huge fan of this kind of song but it's a style we do well, with such ease, that I find myself falling back on these mid-paced pop tunes. Especially when trying to write an album's worth of varying material.

## UNBROKEN

I have no idea why this didn't make the album. It's a fucking storming track that shows a swagger to the band that 'Got It On Tuesday' captured so well. I dunno, maybe we are nervous of songs with too few riffs? One thing is for certain: it's a killer B-side that rivals the A-side for lyrical swing and rhythmic suss.

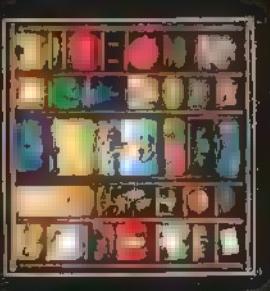
I guess we should have gone for the groove a bit more with The Wildhearts. Eight bars of anything and I always thought it was time for a new part. Hopefully I'll mature out of this impatience when I grow up.

## BORDERTIME

Written on the day I tried to get sober for a few days in Spain. I was sat on a rickety bus on a sunny Sunday morning watching the churchgoers do their thing, I came up with the idea that 'Sunday is definitely not a day for drinkers, Sunday is for the sober,' and the song came along.

It's the kind of riff I've been playing around with since being a 15-year-old Kiss fan and it's also the kind of song that writes itself - much like 'Just In Lust'. Great chorus though. Should have been on the album too.

Where I will move  
to Spain, accept  
emotional defeat,  
end my relationship  
with Danny,  
fall in love,  
learn acceptance,  
discover forgiveness  
and mix an  
album in my  
living room.



## CASINO BAY

The opening track of 'Market Harbour' was written about a place in Puerto Banus, Marbella. It's an area in Spain where Ralph and I stayed to write together – replete with a beach on one side of us and a casino on the other. It wasn't really called Casino Bay, but I renamed it and fully intended to relocate there as soon as I made some money and sold my flat in Gateshead. But things, as always, wouldn't follow the intended plan.

I wanted to make the album I'd always dreamed of making. An album that had no gaps between the songs, just a steady stream of music. The one where you needed to make the tea, take a piss, or skin up before listening to it. The one that you press play and the thing just doesn't let up. The kind of annoying one.

But I had to get it out of my system. I was writing and recording with The Wildhearts and felt that 'Market Harbour' was an album that risked getting lost due to rabid interest in The Wildhearts Mk III reunion. Which was something that tended to happen when that band reunited. Incidentally, 'Market Harbour' was another title that came in my sleep. I swear I didn't even know there was a place called Market Harborough.

The trio of solo albums was essential for me to complete in order to move forward – both artistically and emotionally; I used the albums as catharsis. The first, 'Valor Del Corazon', was the heartbreak album: anger. The second, 'Yoni', was the sex album: denial. The third, Market Harbour, was the philosophical album: acceptance. I figured that without acceptance I'd be left with unfinished emotional surgery that could get infected and harm future progress.

Bedroom activities aside, after working off the Sonic Circus tour debts, I hadn't seen much of my gorgeous flat in Gateshead. The living room was a spacious affair, complete with huge bay windows that gave a simply breath-stealing view of the majestic river. I intended to crowbar the apartment into my schedule and finish the album there. I was determined to have some quality time in this place, dammit.

"Things going up the Tyne and things going down the Tyne," was a mantra that would act as comic relief in weeks to come. We had recorded 70% of the album at Tim Smith's place prior to recording The Wildhearts 'White' album. It merely lay unmixed, formless and without the flow or frills that its completion required. We would finish it in Gateshead.

## SOAP HAMMER

A delightful bit of studio jamming – just messing with ideas and laying them down before they got cold or anyone thought about them for too long. It wasn't until months later I realised how much I could have accomplished with this style of working. Or, for that matter, how effective it was at capturing the spirit at the very moment of conception. At this time, my spirits couldn't have been more confused. Which therefore made the results all the more interesting.

With the Debbie debacle over and the Wildhearts album finished, we were out of budget but dedicated to completing the trilogy of solo albums. I could promise Jase

very little other than my bedroom while we finished the album and the little that could be spared from the modest Cargo advance – and he graciously accepted.

I was still taking speed as it was cheap. I had a couple of great contacts – one of whom would soon end up in prison – shutting down that avenue of pleasure. The other contact would shoot me up, offering a gentle high that levelled me out in the way that Adderall or Ritalin affects its patients. Speed always enabled me to think straight and work with absolute focus. Without it I'm a mass of squabbling ideas and confused intentions – a mental network of intense and constant cerebral traffic. This is exactly how I feel right now and is how I expect I will always feel.

Jane – who became known as the Jäger fairy by this point – would stop by after work, bring us food and fill our bellies with alcohol. She'd then vanish at an ungodly hour to return to work – apparently with no sleep – and repeat the process daily. I couldn't believe her energy. She loved to party and now was playing the role of session nurse. Without her I doubt we'd have bothered to even finish the album, let alone enjoy the process.

But I still viewed the pairing of Jane and I with massive resistance and stubborn suspicion. Although long since estranged (and with very good reason), she was still a bandmate's ex. That was forbidden territory as far as I was concerned. I forgot where I read this to be an actual rule, but I had adopted it like 'thou shalt not kill small dogs' or suchlike. She was single, I was single. We'd both been treated like disposable commodities by our former partners and we were both very lonely. The situation was ludicrous.

### THE QUEEN OF LEAVING

The song that initially brought about the reformation of The Wildhearts – or at least nailed Scott as an obvious successor/stand-in for Danny. After I shared the Malibu ranch with Scott and we wrote a ton of ideas in countless, endless, all-night sessions, things quickly headed south. I hightailed it to Texas and Scott – labouring under canine-like loyalty – stayed to take part in an ill-fated Brides Of Destruction European tour that hammered the final nail in their casket.

Much like a reunion with Angie, I'd maintained hope for Danny's return to the band. But I drifted further away from him despite moving back to his region in the north east. After witnessing his troubling state at the Scarborough debacle, I had to admit that he just wasn't fit to tour. The future was still open but any roads to get there were closed to him. Scott and I on the other hand had become close friends. We stayed in regular contact and experimented with songwriting via email. Which is how 'Queen Of Leaving' was born.

While admittedly I'd normally cringe at other band members' often nonsensical lyrics, I loved that Scott would fire off words that had the power to make me sit back and think. This boy could write like a monster – that much was obvious. In my mind, if you've led a tough life and you're honest with yourself, you can write good lyrics. It's a killer recipe. Unless you're a funny motherfucker, remove either ingredient and you're writing bullshit that means nothing to anyone. Scott had a childhood every bit as harsh as mine. It identified us as friends and unified us as writers.

## ATTENTION!ATTENTION!

With 'Market Harbour', I was going for a trick I'd heard ABBA's manager/producer Stig Anderson use – presumably inspired by Phil Spector – where he would double-track every instrument in the studio. From the drums to the vocals, everything was recorded twice. If vocals were to be double-tracked – as they normally recorded for pop music like ABBA – then they would be quadruple tracked. It was simple but it was genius. It made even the most innocent instrument sound huge. I loved the idea. Denzel wasn't so keen. Not a drummer noted for his regular approach, Denzel would rarely play anything the same twice. He made up drum fills seconds before they arrived and deliberately tried to lose the band in complex arrangements. Yet he still managed to land bang on the beat. It took a confident musician to keep up with him, that's for sure. But asking him to double track himself meant learning every improvised beat and copying every over-zealous drum fill of his own making. So I took great delight in feeding him some of his own medicine. I've enjoyed few things as much as Denzel putting himself through the hell of his own creation. Typically, he pulled it off like a champion.

This song was written about an overly amorous girl (I met her during my time as a trainee man-whore) who saw our brief liaison as more than a bit of fun. Finally it got so bad that I had to get the police to issue a restraining order to keep her away. And I thought being in a relationship was complicated? Being single made it look like child's play.

## THE NINNS OF MOURNING

When Steve Earle recorded with The Del McCoury Band, he described it as "the sound of joy". On listening to their exuberant collaboration, I found that he was, of course, absolutely right. I carried this theory with me for comfort, to use someday. I eventually tried to employ it when recording this section using an old Indian riff of mine. (That's Indian, as in 'of India' as opposed to 'of America', although the term Indian is evidently inappropriate when describing inhabitants of Asia, yet is equally politically incorrect to use for Native American. So no one is called Indian any more? Nope, makes no fucking sense to me either.)

Anyway, I'd use this 'Indian' sounding riff as a finger exercise back when Danny Deen was encouraging me to play. It brought me great joy through the years. As homage to Danny Deen, I was overjoyed to record it. I'd also recently started learning to play a handmade flute I'd bought from a craft shop near Stonehenge whilst at Tim's. I was determined to write and record a riff around it. The marriage of these two entirely unrelated incidents became "The Ninn's Of Mourning". As far as I know, 'Ninn' is a made-up word and I absolutely adore made-up words.

## HOUSE OF MOTHS

Jase and I came to rely on Jane for company and sustenance. As well as – most importantly – a source of joyous exuberance which any two heterosexual men would find hard to sustain. Especially when they were otherwise left alone to mix an album in a living room. Also, I was falling in love with her.

I'd tried to keep in touch with Danny with no success. He didn't even sound like the person I used to know. Already assuming that Jane and I were an item, he tended to yell and hang up more than actually talk. Fate was pushing Jane and I together and there was little that either of us could - nor wanted - to do about it. I yearned for a full time relationship but felt I needed to talk to Danny first. It was the honourable thing to do. He'd found a new woman. It was time that Jane found a new man.

Jane and Danny still shared ownership of a dog. I couldn't understand why one of them didn't just claim the grotty little thing. One day it became my job to drop the dog off at Danny's new girlfriend's house in Newcastle. Danny asked for a lift to South Shields and I thought 'bingo' - a chance for the three of us to talk. It was long overdue. They were friends again, or so it seemed. This was good. This was all very good.

Jane and Danny were obviously over (the details of which don't belong in this book) with no chance of reconciliation. So seeing him finally moving on with someone new, it was obvious to me that a woman as beautiful as Jane wasn't going to stay single forever. Instead of throwing her into the pit of snakes, a potentially hazardous market of male strangers, why wouldn't Danny want her to settle with someone that he knew would be good to her? Someone he'd known like a brother. Someone he knew to be a good man. Shit, he knew I wasn't even unfaithful to my girlfriends when we were on tour.

I thought it was a great time to clear the air, regain contact and discuss the future. As I sat in the jeep waiting for Jane to take the dog for a piss, I spotted Danny. It was good to see him again. He looked frail. He also looked nervous. Or was it nervous? It was a look I couldn't quite place, I just knew it as unfamiliar. Unconnected to the boy I knew. He came to the side of the car and as I leaned towards him to greet him, he punched me squarely in the middle of my face. What happened next may not sound like the truth, but I swear that this is what happened.

As the initial rush of anger enveloped me, my first instinct was to open the car door and jump him, but my subconscious was yelling, "How could you beat your brother? This was Danny, the boy you'd known since before he'd even left home, when he was barely old enough to drink in the bars he played. How could you hurt your brother?" I simply couldn't. I was hurt but not angry.

In automatic reaction I leaned forward to turn on the ignition. To get away maybe? To make sense of what had just happened? My own brother had just punched me. Nothing was clear anymore. As I turned the key, another blow came through the open window, connecting with my face again. The world turned into a very dark, dangerous place. Instinct kicked in with more force than I'd ever known.

I started to reverse the car. With one move of my left hand and with Danny standing 15 feet in front of me, I put the car into drive and went to slam my foot down hard. With my inner anger at the surface, the person that didn't want to hurt, Danny had been replaced by a monster, a terrifying personality. I intended to run over and kill Danny McCormack. Hitting drive and ploughing forward would have taken a second; a Mitsubishi can move very quickly.

In the time it took to put my foot to the pedal my mind's eye was transported to

a prison visiting room. My son Jake was on the other side of the visitor's window, crying. It's as clear as any memory I have. I was sat looking at him sobbing and I had nothing to say. I'm consumed by shame and remorse. Then the scene suddenly changes to one of Danny's body wrapped around a stone bollard. The shape looks more like padded clothes tied together. His head, arms and legs are pointed away from me, arranged like a human shoehorn wrapped around a stone post.

After this startling moment I'm brought back to my senses. I automatically slam the car into reverse and speed backwards, watching this smaller version of the Danny I'd known get smaller and smaller. As I watched him leaving my life, I saw something right behind him. Something I hadn't even noticed until I was reversing. A single stone bollard. I'd seen a vision of the future - as vivid as the world in front of me right now. I'd been shown my fate. Sounds fanciful, possibly ridiculous, but that's as accurate as I can make it.

Jane climbed back into the car - unaware of what had taken place. She screamed. I looked in the rear view mirror. My face was splattered in my blood. A wound caused by someone I'd considered a brother. I felt nothing. No pain, no emotion. Emptiness.

I drove in complete silence as she cried. I drove Jane home to her apartment. I closed the door on her. I vowed that I'd never lay sight on either of them again.

Going home and explaining it to Jase was another bizarre experience entirely. I remember sitting on the couch explaining the reason for the blood on my face and the disastrous situation with Jane. I attempted to go into details of the largely unexplainable flash-forward that had taken place in the car just before almost ploughing into Danny. The point where it seemed I'd been given a peek into the future - both the immediate future and the more distant future - simultaneously. I began crudely describing the moment where there was no timeline. That everything that had happened, was happening and would happen all took place at the very same time. Then my second peak experience suddenly took place.

The light I'd felt shoot through the ceiling into that lonely room at the ranch back in Malibu reappeared. The time where I'd been given divine insight - or whatever the fuck it was - that same light hit me again. But this time it came from within my head and out of my face. As sure as I'm writing this now, the particles of my body started to dismantle. Once again, for a second, I was formless and I was everywhere. I laughed and the laugh came from the kitchen. I wasn't on the couch at all, I was everywhere and everything.

Slowly, but suddenly, I was back on the couch. My head filled with a red and golden light. I was back in a seated position, left with an overwhelming feeling that I'd been through something very special. It was as if I'd not only done the right thing, but had glimpsed something ethereal because of it.

Speaking to Jase about this experience now, he said that during the incident on the sofa, he witnessed a golden glow around me "like the Ready Brek kids" (an old British TV ad where children have a surrounding thermal glow from eating breakfast porridge). Jase is a very honest man and he knows what he saw, as certain as I know what I felt. Listen, I don't meditate. I don't hug trees. I don't believe in fairies. I know how crazy this sounds. But it's also the truth.

## AWARENESS AND THE GREAT INTEGRITY

A song written about the hardest of times. That most complex of emotional assault courses that the medical profession conveniently labels depression. Moments where all purpose is replaced by a lifeless acceptance that carries you through the turmoil like a piece of paper in a heavy wind.

Jase had battled through the darkest times with me, always a rock, always my confidant and always there to press 'record', no matter the quality of the results. For some reason we both agreed that capturing the desperate authenticity of resignation was important too. Those howling tears of rage and rejection as well as growing the strength to carry on. That shit could mean something to someone someday. The worst thing that could happen was that I'd sound like a bit of a fool. I already felt like Coco the fucking clown.

So we kept the record button lit and I laid down this vocal, something that I'd describe more as purging than singing. This was the sound of genuine effort. Of a man lifting himself from the ground and marking out a point some feet above his place of crippling grief. A point where, with the greatest of intent, he will once again hold his head. The struggle was familiar but the pain - much like a fresh tattoo - always felt brand new. The climb back would never be simple. It never could be.

I started reading about Buddhism and positive thinking. I crammed in Osho, Chopra, Lao Tzu, Dr Wayne Dyer and the Dalai Lama. I was fighting to get back with such a vengeance you could have stuck the fucking Rocky soundtrack to it.

I started exercising, dieting and learning forgiveness. The latter was without a doubt the hardest. How do you forgive without real forgiveness? You simply can't. It has to be meant, it has to be real. I had to get honest with myself, with my feelings and with my forgiveness. For someone who held grudges like a tree holds age, I slowly started to let go. And as soon as I began to let go, with honesty and with conviction, the pain slowly vanished. I started to believe.

## HOW HARD CAN YOU MAKE IT?

Angie had another baby. I guess I'd always thought she might realise the mistake she'd made and we'd get back together in the course of time. But with a new baby in the mix, the possibility of a reunion in the future became a closed door forever. I broke down when I heard. I cried for a solid day. I'm not even sure why. I guess it's like attending the funeral of someone who has already lay dead in a box for a week. Someone who had died slowly and entirely expectedly, but finally laying them to rest and mournfully accepting their physical absence from your life forever.

Once again, as with so many times before, the guitar in the corner acted as my comfort, my life raft and my psychologist. It was fine that she had officially moved on. It was just as painful as hell. That pain wouldn't shut the fuck up - no matter how much bravado I loaded on top of it. I wrote this song from my own perspective, as a letter to her. I was also writing it in the third person and feeling it all simultaneously. My depression had hit bottom. But still, within the equivalent hopelessness of being in a blackened room with no exits, the songs still came. Angie was gone. It was official. That hurt more than I could say. But somehow I could write it.

## A PHILOSOPHICAL CONVERSATION ABOUT AGE

A simple conversational interlude with my Uncle Michael and I talking about my Uncle David. I was always closest in personality to my Uncle David. He was the uncle who managed my first band, Zig Zag. He was the uncle that let me use one of his apartments in Spain. He was always the go-getter of the family. The one who would take chances, never give up, no matter the odds. He taught me so much about perseverance.

He has only recently left prison. Which also makes him the only relative with whom I share the experience of prison time – although his sentence was five years and mine was only two weeks. My Uncle David is a truly great man. I'm proud that I resemble him in so many ways.

### JOSSE BANK

This is the argument I have about production in music. When someone tells me something is 'too distorted', it's the same to me as saying Toy Story would be better with real actors. I also think that missing the point – often by miles – is just an unfortunate part of the relationship between musician and listener. Something that doesn't happen on such a fundamental level in any other walk of art. Music fans are often critics and critics are merely experts of something they don't do.

Take 'Josser Bank', for instance. It's written about the furious indignation that is the ageing process. A hopeless, unavoidable and quite frankly inglorious reality for most people. A slow limp to the end.

To my ears, this pissed-off sonic attack suits the frustration of the protagonist, just as a radio-friendly mix would turn it into Broadway musical version of a Mike Leigh movie. I love the way that 'Josser Bank' sounds. It's perfect. And I wrote it, so surely I'm right. Right?

Critics can like something or they can hate something, it's a free world, all yer boots. But to deny that this 'something' isn't exactly what the artist had in mind reduces critics to nothing but over-opinionated fools.

### TENNANTS

Written as the intended theme for a TV show, to be made by my old mentor Danny Deen and Philip Richardson. The show received its name after Danny Deen came out with the immortal line, "Ever noticed how homeless people drink a lager called Tennent's?" Comic brilliance all the way. I will never stop missing him.

It was – as you might imagine if you've seen Danny Deen's art – the most vile and tasteless TV show ever filmed. I thought it was pure genius and prayed for it to take off, carrying my theme tune with it. Unfortunately, Danny didn't live long enough to see it sold to a company that loved it as much it should have been. The people involved wanted to have it tamed, clipped and turned into something disposable to overstuff an already bulging market of slightly daring yet ultimately acceptable comedy.

The world simply wasn't ready for comedy that would push taste to its very limits; Tenants pre-dated Chris Morris' *Blue Jam* by some years. It created an ever-expanding world of challenging comedy that, if nourished by public outrage, could have grown into a comedy monster. I've always despised good taste on the grounds that it supposedly represents an established barometer of social acceptance, which broadens with time, anyway. I also despise social acceptance for this reason - the alternative to social acceptance is simply growth.

## **REGRET.COM**

Every morning while mixing The Wildhearts (or 'the White album') in Tamworth, I'd run along the cut and listen to the geese chatting excitedly amongst themselves, gossiping about their day. One morning I took my dictaphone along with me and recorded their conversation. Based on the fool I'd made of myself as a result of my online love affair, I'm delighted that their happy warbling made this melancholy song breathe lighter.

Featuring the 'beautiful tones of Dick Decent', this track probably houses more inherent sorrow than the entire album combined. This is a difficult one to listen to - for me anyway.

## **BLACK YEAR**

I like this being one long, hard minute of improvised guitar bleeding, that serves as a fitting segue in undoubtedly the saddest section of this album.

## **I KNEW YOU (An Amnesia)**

For me, sadness incarnate is looking over the edge of a break-up, staring down into the pit of all that was. Stacks of busted furniture that used to be comfortable chairs; broken picture frames that once decorated family pictures; a child's toy or shoe, now outgrown by years. Meaningless trash that once meant so much when things were vital and important.

Like when you see a half demolished house where the wallpaper - once painstakingly pasted up by a father's hand - is now naked and on public display. Out of context and no longer private without the security of family walls. What someone once called home, now without the value of affection. Who could look at such things and not feel a great sense of loss? This kind of thing chokes me up, even if those belongings were never mine or the building was the property of someone I never knew or will meet. Ultimately, if something of importance eventually ended, was it ever even yours to begin with?

## **YOU AND ME (That's What I Want)**

And this kind of thing makes me smile again. That's Jasmine, my little girl. The trouble with little kids making up songs is that you can't be sure if they have actually made it up or have heard it on TV and are just pretending to have made it up. Not until the writer's publishing company gets in touch anyway. I guess one of the valid benefits of existing beneath the radar is that you don't get hoisted up the pole for stuff like this.

One day I expect I'll hear it in a Disney movie or something and be thankful for my negligible presence in the world of music litigation. Every cloud, eh?

Jazzy used to sing this song all the time, and although she was unable to play the tune or maintain the tempo, I got a rough outline of what she was going for, or at least I hoped so. She likes the song anyway.

I really wish I'd released this as a single. I'm convinced that everyone in the world could use a daily dose of a kid's genuine laughter. The sheer joy that is a little girl being tickled, in the middle of this track, is one of my favourite things that I've ever heard recorded.

### **COUPLER TROUBLE**

The golden tones of Lee Small, an unassuming man who came down to the studio mainly to give me a break from singing. I'd had it on good authority that he owned a great voice, so we sat back in the control booth while he let it all out. The collective clang of our jaws hitting the floor might have sounded like a firework going off.

"Was that awlroit?" asked Lee, in his luxurious black country twang. "Alright" it most certainly was not. I'd been singing "alright" for years. I knew the sound of "alright" and this wasn't it. This was of Stevie Wonder quality. This was vocal gold. A whole room of males wanted to fuck this voice.

Complete with a Zappa-esque doo-wop backing vocal track - written and performed completely by Jon Poole - this was undoubtedly a career highpoint for me. It's another example of how much happier I am when other people provide the vocals to my music.

I never made much of a secret about it - I always wanted to find a lead singer to

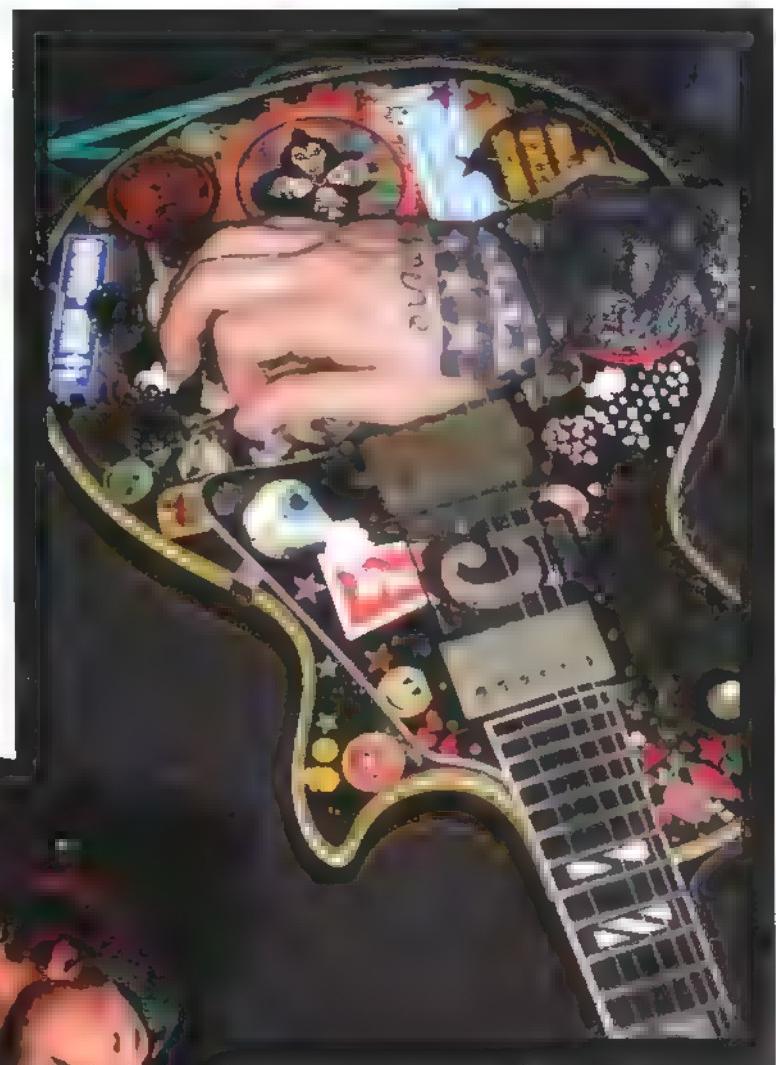
sing my songs. Although I doubt I'd have lasted as long in this mercurial business if my dream had come true. Once again, I can only thank bad luck for my good fortune.

### **THE PERILOUS BURDEN OF PRODIGAL OBLIGATION**

A song written about my experience with love being a suffocating affliction. When love threatens to choke the air from the person being squeezed and the joy from the one doing the squeezing. I've seen love get so possessive that it forgot how sweet the goodness felt before infatuation kicked its teeth in.

I've written a lot of songs about the unattractive effects that love has sustained on lonely people I've known, myself included. Suffice to say, I've seen far less damage caused by drugs. I've also seen hate bear the closest resemblance to love in its all-encompassing self-obsessive need to dominate.

Most of the love I've known is the kind that would stick a pin through a butterfly to stop it flying away from its possessor. For the most part, love sucks simply because people aren't very good at it, notably because of the fact that it involves having equal feelings for someone else. Something that features as highly in most human DNA as the ability to fly.



## A MALTEU CHRONICLE

The Phoenix Ranch – what a time. A book unto itself and a great place to spend time healing a broken heart. I'm still not sure why this song didn't make it onto 'Valor Del Corazon'. I'm almost positive I just forgot I'd written it.

Housebound after a rainfall so heavy it dislodged the surrounding mountain area and caused a massive roadblock, the household was delighted to find that we had all the requisite necessities: plenty of wine and plenty of drugs. We were gonna be fine for a very long time. I'd been hitting everything so hard I had to puke one evening – something I very rarely do when drinking. No boasting, I'm just not much of a puker. Still, this one time I ran into the toilet and threw up what seemed like a large bucket of red wine. Not much of a mystery there then, since our favourite brand was Vendange, a cheap brand of wine we'd purchase by the gallon at the store just down the hill. Once I'd puked out most of my buzz, I started drinking again. But I'd sobered up enough to remember that we'd already cleared the store of red Vendange even before the roadblock. All we'd been drinking since being housebound was white and rosé. The puke was obviously a huge outpouring of blood from what must have been a pretty nasty ulcer.

I never did see a doctor. I don't trust the process. Every time I go to those guys, if I contracted, I'd probably go to see a doctor about. But I digress. I never puked up blood again. I think I'd like to sit down with Scott, discuss the events that took place and rewrite a book about The Phoenix Ranch someday. That was one hell of a fucking story.

## OVEREASY

Another song about breaking up. It was a hot topic at the time. It's written about how easy it is for one person to assume a normal life once something as vital as a family has been torn apart, while the other is crushed within an inch of their lives. The irony being that everyone deals with things in their own time. Ultimately, identical feelings of hurt eventually cross each other on the escalators at some point. No one gets out of broken relationships unscathed, no matter how tough the hide or sensitive the skin. Everyone hurts and everyone heals on their own watch. I did mine immediately and nowadays I'm glad I did.

In fact the only thing truly damaged by the casualty of break-ups is the children's attitude towards relationships. If you take the increasing divorce statistics which show that 50% of marriages end up on the scrap heap, it doesn't take Isaac Newton to calculate that a lot of fucked-up children are making a lot of fucked up children. At some point the gene pool will be reduced to a distorted vat of confusion and distrust which no sane person would want to bathe in. Presumably forcing smart people to remain single in the future. Hey, it's a theory.

Surely if you loved your children as much as they need and deserve to be loved, you'd put your feelings second and try anything on God's green and pleasant spinning ball to save them from being hurt. Right? Further indicating that failure to do so reveals human beings to be a breed of animal so naturally selfish as to be technically unfit for parenthood. Yet we continue to procreate at a rate rising in

proportion to our predictably disintegrating relationships.

Mishandled by modern standards, love is a concept so potentially damaging that our very inhabitance on this planet could be fatally affected by it. Or maybe we'll just get dumber? Either way, the end of the world doesn't look so unappealing sometimes, does it?

### EYE OF THE ROTUNDA

The Rotunda is a cylindrical building in the heart of Birmingham that became our main view when adding instruments to 'Market Harbour' in a brief session at the Birmingham Custard Factory. It was between the Tim Smith sessions and the Gateshead sessions. The Rotunda was completed in 1965 and as the urban myth goes, had a revolving top floor. It successfully revolved only once, then promptly broke down, never to spin again.

During its 2006 refurbishment, a giant LED eyeball was 'built' into this now dormant floor. It blinked, looked around and occasionally stared in one direction for an unsettling amount of time. It stared directly at us. We'd been there for days before we noticed there was a huge eye surveying our progress as we worked. Jase and I would occasionally remark, "no-one is going to believe there is actually something called the eye of the rotunda." An oddity most definitely deserving of its own song title.

### SHATTERPROOF

"A broken heart won't kill you, you just want to die." – Dolly Parton, 'Endless Stream Of Tears'.

A fitting end to a fairly exhausting album and an ambiguous yet satisfying conclusion to the soul-searching trilogy of solo adventures. A journey that began with inward-facing, self-consuming anger and ultimately ended by challenging the world to a scrap!

"Just try hurting something that patently can't be killed," it yelled indignantly, daring life to give you its best shot, square in the mush, sincerely doubting it can create any more damage than that you've already dealt with.

If the trilogy hoped to find an answer then it was "life just happens". There is no sense to the chaos and no precautionary measures to protect you from its slings and arrows. We aren't animals with enough humility for natural order. We seem designed to go against natural logic. Nature digs down, we build up. Our ambitions are purely self-centred and without any concern of how they negatively affect the needs of the species as a whole. In fact, by concentrating on our own agenda – an attitude fully promoted by the media, another man made constraint – we continually blind ourselves to the bigger picture by design. It's all about YOU, isn't it? Your face, your possessions, your profile, your effect on the world. A world that ironically doesn't even notice you – because of how absorbed we are in ourselves.

We create beauty and we fill it with ugly habits. We build upwards while we walk around looking down. We make up our faces as society demands, yet avoid eye



contact; for fear of the unknown. And the punchline? The fear stems from the fact that we aren't encouraged to know and love ourselves. Quite the opposite. We are an identikit of information, warnings, competition. We barely exist. Life doesn't hurt us, it can only hurt the illusion we've created. Our fears are imaginary, our pain is only bruising to our ego, and the hurt isn't even real. And that's what really hurts.



## Where I join Alcoholics

Anonymous,  
get ejected from  
New York,  
get grim in  
Denmark,  
enlist new  
management  
and watch  
The Wildhearts  
go down for  
the third time.

## THE JACKSON WHITES

After hiring then firing stand-in manager Gav McCaughey, The Wildhearts collectively decided on enlisting a full time manager in the shape of Virpi Immonen. She was previously in charge of Hanoi Rocks and we believed she would help us crack vital markets outside of the UK. We wanted to make an album that was huge and orchestral in ambition.

So after tracking down producer Jacob Hansen (who had crafted such great sounding albums with Volbeat), Virpi arranged a deal and we set off to write an album that would best sit with his bombastic style of production. Actually, that's not technically true. Originally I'd planned for 'Chutzpah!' to be a wildly fluctuating album of conflicting parts. The intention was to make it impossible to both relax and enjoy listening. But after initial band writing sessions began, it was obvious that the guys wanted to make something more commercial. With this being our third - and probably final chance at cracking it - who was I to argue? The guys deserved the commercial success they so rightly coveted, so song arrangement took a more streamlined approach.

Writing the album began in my then hometown of New York City, where I went to detox and get sober for a short while. After finding out that Jane was pregnant, however, the sobriety immediately extended to nine months and continued after the birth, until I'd notched up about a year and a half in total. I was getting in shape, thinking clearly and aiming all my darts at the middle of the board. This felt like my final stab at gaining recognition with The Wildhearts. Who knew? If I was healthy in mind and body, maybe this time would be different than the other attempts?

I'm glad that I got to experience being insanely fit after years of wondering what all the fuss was about, but I can honestly say that gym sessions and AA meetings can do very little in the way of lifting apparent curses from rock bands. Whilst very sober and very serious, The Wildhearts' third reunion would ultimately prove as disastrous as any previous incarnations of our trouble-ridden troupe.

'The Jackson Whites' was one of the first songs written for the album. Its riff woke me in the middle of the night and lingered long enough for me to cram it into my iPhone voice recorder. It was a painful irony having a beautiful apartment in Stuyvesant Town, Manhattan, overlooking the glorious East River. I had no social life outside of endless Alcoholics Anonymous meetings which fuelled the bleak lyrics. The title was inspired by a multi-racial hybrid race of Ramapough Indians said to live as outcasts deep in the mountains. At least that was the version of the story I'd been told by a good friend. I immediately loved the title and story but wondered how I'd ever fit it into a song. As a member of NYC's alcohol-free community, I instantly seemed to know every third person in Manhattan, but I realised I had never felt as socially alone in my life and the song was born. The aim of 'The Jackson Whites' was to capture the absolute joylessness that is a room full of sober men discussing nothing but drinking.

## PLASTIC JEBUS

Once the financial recession of 2008 hit Wall Street, the rest of the world seemed to go down overnight. My own income also suffered at the ailing dollar conversions at the same time that Stuy Town upped the rent (in a move that would be later proven 'historically fraudulent'). Jane and I were forced us out of our apartment and out of the high-cost hustle of NYC residency. It broke my fucking heart.

I've never been so emotionally affected by relocation in the many, many years of almost constant upheaval I'd previously endured. I wanted to make New York work for me so very badly. Having to accept the financial reality of my situation felt like being informed that I was to have a limb removed.

With Taylor barely one-year-old, Jane was forced back to her hometown of St Helens in Merseyside. I was sent directly to a studio in Denmark where Jacob Hansen worked. The only place he'd work, in fact. His relocation was never an option. Whilst he's a dutiful and loyal family man, I'm convinced that if Jacob Hansen took jobs abroad, he'd be one of the biggest producers in the world.

Entering the studio accommodation with the guys, the culture shock couldn't have been greater if I'd been sent back in time to the great plague. The four members of The Wildhearts arrived groggily in the early evening at our abandoned lodgings (Jacob refusing to work past 4pm). We were greeted by a bombsite that was left by the previous occupants. Broken tables, filthy beds, garbage littering the floor and the unwelcome stench of an evidently non-hygienic Scando-metal band met our arrival.

We reached into our bags for all the duty-free liquor we'd bought at the airport. Drinking deeply, we decided there were two options available. Either we tidied the place up or exact a thorough trashing to this fucking hovel. Which we did. Properly.

In the morning we woke up surrounded by tinder sticks. We'd even smashed up the smashed-up pieces of broken furniture. While the hangover probably made the carnage look worse, a 10/10 was scored for demolition diligence. It helped boost band morale for a time, at least.

'Plastic Jebus' emerged during the first week of recording. The chorus line was supplied by Scott with a group mentality still very much intact. The song must have gone through a dozen title changes until we gave up (as opposed to settled on) finding a title. We chose 'Plastic Jebus', largely because the original title of 'Plastic Jesus' had been used more times than the filthy beds at the studio lodgings.

## JOHN OF VIOLENCE

I remember writing this in my apartment in Stuy Town before the 'Chutzpah!' sessions were even discussed. This song would have featured on 555%, along with 'You Took The Sunshine From New York' if The Wildhearts hadn't needed new songs so immediately. But I was more than happy to invest tunes in our new, make-or-break recording.

Based upon the real-life fortunes of someone not actually called John, I wanted to make the chorus both melancholy yet uplifting. A delicate balancing act that

can make for a thrilling listen if approached with due care. I think we pulled it off. Looking back to the 'Chutzpah!' sessions, I can only really recall the first week as being fun - mostly because this was the only time the band were together as a four-man unit. It was a good time. We made friends with the affable farmer next door (he let Scott and CJ fish in his lake for our supper) and he invited us into his Swedish-style outhouse for drinks and delicacies. We were writing together, hanging out. We convinced ourselves that we were a very tight band of friends embarking on our breakthrough album.

But once the drums and main backing tracks were down, Ritch charged off back home to his family. I was left to man the session until the very last moment while CJ and Scott commandeered two bicycles from the farmer next door and set off exploring the countryside and bars of Denmark. Every day at 4pm, the studio was empty. By the third week, the session was way behind schedule. At this point, the producer's reins were placed in my hands. I sat drinking piss-weak Danish beer and waited for the guys to return. I ordered everyone to up their game. We needed to work harder and start earlier if we were to get all the songs finished on time. I wasn't getting paid to reinforce this law or chastise the band. The producer was, but I knew the album wouldn't get finished unless someone did.

Whether it was because of my new role as session whip-cracker, or the collective hatred for the living arrangements and lack of outside stimulation, the studio mood soured progressively. I couldn't wait to be done and get out of the place.

We maintained bravado throughout but by the time the album was finally completed, I was relieved. I had no interest in the running order or even which songs made the final cut. To be honest, I barely cared about the mix and I left Ritch in charge to sign off on the final version.

I'd entered into this reformation on the proviso it would be a working co-operative. A democratic committee that made decisions together and shared responsibilities. I was already sensing a lack of collective accountability that was all too fucking familiar.

#### **YOU ARE PROOF THAT NOT ALL WOMEN ARE INSANE**

A track written in New York but finished in Denmark where feeling homesick had started to eat into my concentration. I missed my family who were now back home somewhere in the UK. All my thoughts were consumed with Jane bringing up our little boy alone. I drank cheap beer by night quietly resenting Ritch being back home whilst desperately clinging onto our schedule during the day.

A fortnight in, every day at the studio was a slog. The end of the session seemed a far way off. Sundays were the worst. Jacob took a day off so nothing could be done. We dreaded Sundays. I particularly feared them as a potential portal to the crippling depression that resurfaced as a result of drinking again after 18 dry months. I hadn't planned on picking it up again. But at the same time I never thought that sobriety was a lifestyle choice I felt entirely comfortable making. I white-knuckled through my entire time in AA, asking myself, "what would I do if Keith Richards offered me a drink?" I knew the answer: "I'd fucking drink it." My AA days were numbered.

I knew I'd start again, it was a matter of when and how. When was with a gathering of friends. I'd maxed out all the possible fun in hanging out with drinking buddies in a bar whilst nursing a Diet Pepsi. How arrived as Jane and I made our goodbyes that night, calmly walking home via 1st Avenue. Without a word said, we walked straight into Otto's Shrunken Head Bar on East 14th Street and ordered ourselves alcoholic drinks. As I pounded a shot of whiskey and drank deep from a cold Heineken, the music on the jukebox (Alice In Chains) suddenly turned 3D. It sounded vitally important again. Floods of Wildhearts riffs started charging through my head. It was as liberating as losing one's virginity and every bit as much fun. I knew I was home.

Our next visit to Otto's saw me run into a hairdresser friend who'd cut my hair many times. He downed Jack Daniel's, as I sipped Diet Coke and looked on in envy. By this point, Jane & I knew we had to leave New York so I was adamant that I'd drink with him before we left. The drink turned into a joint in the toilets. I lost all sense of time and left Jane alone in the bar for over two hours. I eventually returned home to a furious partner and a reminder of my dark times of partying too hard.

I'm happy to report that Jane - being the smartest girl I ever met - soon forgave me. Whenever we get the chance, we still party like Vikings.

#### KIM SMITH

Featuring the first riff written for 'Chutzpah!' - back when Jase and I were mixing 'Market Harbour' - this is a song about Cardiacs main man and my dear friend, Tim. Responsible for some of my most favourite times ever in recording studios (not to mention at Cardiacs' incredible live shows), I've always held Tim aloft as the greatest man who ever walked on the earth (the song's original title). I penned this in his honour while simultaneously berating an industry that would ignore such talent in favour of the relative creative lightweights that openly admitted his influence.

The song also hints at a utopian system where the fans "take control of the wheel" and allow musicians the chance to create outside of the limitations of the establishment.

When finally recorded - years before PledgeMusic became that exact fan-driven vehicle - Tim would sadly never get to enjoy that freedom for which this song yearns. A few months after the time of the 'Chutzpah!' sessions, Tim suffered a near-fatal heart attack and combined stroke. He was left in a brief coma from which he never fully physically recovered. When 'Chutzpah!' was finally manufactured, I took the first copy to Tim in hospital. It was the first time I'd seen him since the 'Market Harbour' sessions.

I couldn't hide my shock as I was faced with a pencil-thin, agonisingly contorted Tim Smith sitting in a large chair. He was clearly in such extreme pain and discomfort that I can't begin to imagine the horror of a fully active brain - that of a genius - trapped inside this crumpled shell. It feels trite to say that I'll always be haunted by this visit and seeing this great man reduced to invalidity, but not to do so would also be inappropriate.

The music industry continues to applaud the meagre and barely noteworthy proffering token accolades and ostentatious ornaments as perverse status symbols. It's important to remember that talent is rarely appreciated unless it's on such a level as to benefit the industry itself. The music industry likes to feel as important as the music itself. Mere skill in one's field holds little importance in a business obsessed with statistics and kudos. I wish Tim could have experienced the freedom that fan-funding would have offered him. Especially since his fan base is every bit as loyal and supportive as that of The Wildhearts.

### **LOW ENERGY VORTEX**

Based on a melody that Scott and I came up with at the Phoenix Ranch in Malibu, I'd intended this to be heavily-distorted, My Bloody Valentine-flavoured attack on the senses. Instead it's a very basic rock song which generally benefits from its more traditional approach. Although I can't help thinking that we missed a trick by reining it in so much.

I love writing with Scott. He understands a good lyric, which is astonishingly rare. 'Low Energy Vortex' was another example of how effective writing by email can be when working with the correct partner. The lyrics detail the levels of debauchery and freedom we enjoyed when we shared our haunted digs in Malibu. That spirit was introduced into The Wildhearts with Scott's arrival and evident when writing this track. There was no denying that a chemistry existed in this line-up. Although such confidence would be eroded by the time the album was released, I'm glad that we captured our essence in which may well be the final Wildhearts album.

### **YOU TOOK THE SUNSHINE FROM NEW YORK**

I wrote this back when I was in New York after the final visit from a heavily pregnant Jane.

At the time of writing, I was staying in a single room apartment on the Lower East Side. Jane was reaching her third trimester and would be unable to make visits again until after the birth. Knowing that I would need to find us an apartment large enough to house a family, I had little else to do but continue writing, stay sober and locate suitable accommodation for our return. Just as soon as Taylor was old enough to travel.

As of now we only had this tiny room with no air conditioning and a single window I'd leave open all day in a bid to freshen the apartment. When we returned from the daily shopping, we'd invariably return to a house full of wildlife. From baby pigeons unaware of New York squatting etiquette, to squirrels who would ransack the kitchen area leaving food trails from the cupboard to the escape. The animals seemed oblivious to danger, which we interpreted as them being comfortable around us. In truth it was likely a result of brazen wildlife that would rob anywhere providing there was decent plunder up for grabs.

Despite its shortcomings, I loved the apartment. I wrote at least half of the songs for '555%' there. It became a ritual to write and record a song a day for an initial 50 days of sobriety. 'You Took The Sunshine From New York' was earmarked for another album entirely, a solo album. In fact even up to the rehearsal stages





I still didn't think it sounded like a Wildhearts song. I'm very fond of the chorus. It effectively conveys the sense of hopelessness I felt when Jane left the apartment to return home, knowing that this was the last time she'd see this place, the squirrels and the baby pigeons.

*"It rained the day you took that ride to JFK and made your way back home again  
There's nothing much more lonely than the rain beating down on the fire escape  
There's grey skies over the United States  
When you walk, you take the sunshine from New York."*

### MAZEL TOV COCKTAIL

I swear this is true: when I first played this song in rehearsal, it was laughed out of the room. I clung onto it throughout the recording sessions and insisted that we just nail it down regardless, if only for a possible B-side. On hearing it for the first time, Bitch said, "It sounds like Bryan fuckin' Adams," which I took to be a very bad critique. But strangely, I don't know anyone who actually dislikes Bryan Adams. Truth is, it reminded me of 'Got It On Tuesday'. In my head I could hear the crowd singing the chorus.

A few months later the song was wheeled out for a live airing and my vision was fully realised. To the amazement of the band, the crowd yelled the chorus back to us as loud as anything we'd been playing for ten years or more. Nowadays this song is a stone-cold live classic. I can rely upon it to liven up any audience in any situation, whether playing acoustic, with The Wildhearts, or in the solo band.

'Mazel Tov Cocktail' was written about the misery of my Alcoholics Anonymous experience. But I have to say that during my time in the programme, I witnessed miraculous scenes of life-defining turnarounds in people's fortunes. People experienced a higher power that gave them the strength to improve. Families were saved from the brink of destruction due to new-found spiritual paths forged as a result of the meetings.

I'd already discovered my spiritual path some time earlier and I entered the programme a very confused but spiritually-minded human being. I couldn't avoid noticing the messy glue job - tacking elements of Buddhism to a Christian doctrine. To me, it smacked of snake oil salesmen flogging cocaine as a miracle cure. Much of the time it felt like swapping an addiction for another addiction. The truth is that not everyone in the programme needed the programme. They didn't really need to be there. This affirmed my suspicions, much to my dismay. There was an inevitable element of people who were just lonely and hooked on mixers and alcopops, grasping for some company in the big lonely city. There were even gay predators who'd use the groups as meat markets. Some openly and with absolutely no shame.

Then there was the debasement of having to confess and apologise for your sins to friends and family, which didn't appear to be optional. I couldn't make anyone understand that not only did I have very few sins for which to apologise, but my friends were all also drinking during my time as an apparent alcoholic. They would have been mortally confused by a call from me apologising (especially from

the glamour of fucking Manhattan) for something neither of us remembered in the first place. The truth was that most of them would have been more fucking drunk anyway.

I learnt that I wasn't technically an alcoholic - which was verified by the final element that forced me out of the fellowship: the sponsors themselves.

Evidently wiser and with more years of sobriety than me, they'd use their sobriety as some kind of understanding of a world to which I was closer. Some of these guys had been straight for so long they'd never even tried crack; they were taken down by Johnnie Walker. Their time on the wagon pre-dated the years where crack destroyed entire communities - not just the odd family.

Whatever the weapon. Booze, drugs, they're all dangerous in the wrong hands, right? I'd agree 100% with them - if their argument wasn't so blindly out of whack with my situation.

"You'll die if you pick it up again," they'd say.

"What, you mean immediately?"

"Maybe not, 'but sooner or later,'" would be the reply.

It was like the logic of the fucking Moonies.

Anyway, I left the clan and didn't die. Well, not yet anyway. In fact I did a damn sight better than one of my sponsors who also fell off the wagon about a week after me. Over 13 years clean, he woke up in a motel some days later with a couple of hookers and in possession of a serious amount of cocaine. His divorce was issued shortly after.

I've never woken up with numerous days missing and in the company of girls paid to fuck me. I can only assume it's because alcohol doesn't make everyone behave like the self-centred prick that my sponsor proved himself to be.

## **CHUTZPAH**

Originally titled 'Chutzpah II', as 'Chutzpah! Jnr' (originally titled 'Chutzpah!') was written as the first song on the album. Confused? You should have been there.

I had great plans. I wanted 'The Jackson Whites' to be the album's lead-off single. Complete with a promo video featuring camped-up warriors on a ship, fresh from battle overseas. It would announce the official return of The Wildhearts - just like 'Vanilla Radio' had done five years previously - and usher in the most successful period the band had ever experienced. We would make up for lost time. We were fit and we were more than able.

Sadly, there was no promotional video at all. There wasn't even a single released to clubs. In fact there was very little promotion of which to speak. It was like we were deliberately being kept a secret. While enjoying the best reviews that we could

possibly hope, each predicting greater things than the last, the band had no tour support. This meant we wouldn't gain a following beyond that we already had. We were encouraged to play headline slots to new European audiences that barely broke double figure attendances.

Even the photos of the band were old shots taken just after the recording of the previous album. There wasn't a new photo session until about two months before we split. The final insult was a request to play a punk festival in Denmark, only to discover on arrival that we'd been booked to play a glam rock festival. The audience viewed us like we were crew members who'd jumped onstage to play someone else's instruments.

At the hostel we'd been booked into that night (three per room, in bunk beds), we tried to laugh about it. But no amount of alcohol could lighten the situation. Even as we listened to drunken glam rockers outside of our door complain about running out of hairspray. It felt like another ignoble lurch to another unavoidable conclusion.

I'd been here before; I could sense the end approaching like horses sense a storm. I began advising the band to batten down the hatches or change direction. But I was committed to the band being a democracy and accepted that majority rule would dictate the next step. I wasn't shocked when that next step was into the familiar abyss of wasted opportunity as we blindly walked off yet another cliff edge and into obscurity. I wasn't shocked, but I was disappointed. Bitterly disappointed. It felt like our last chance and we'd blown it again. Without a long-term plan of any description, we were once again starved into submission. We accepted defeat like a punch-drunk boxer.

I had a new family and I had a new problem. I was financially ruined and in no position to accept my responsibility as a father and breadwinner. The dream of being a rock star required the administration of smelling salts in order to wake the fuck up.

I needed a job. A chance to work with a band of professionals in a position to provide a decent wage. So on a final drunken night out with the Wildheart team (complete with band and crew members fighting with strangers and being ordered to leave the venue), with exhausted resignation I surveyed the opportunities available to me.

I was in my 40s. Being famous for getting kicked out of bars wasn't funny any more. It certainly wasn't going to feed my family either.

I walked backstage to escape the carnage and meet Alice Cooper. I found myself in the company of Michael Monroe. I'd always liked Michael. He held himself like a pro and appeared to be an unstoppable force of nature.

"Michael," I asked, "Can I join your band?"



CHAPTER FIFTEEN B:  
CHUTZPAH! JNR

**ICHUTZPAH! JNR**

Intended to be the intro to the album (segueing into "The Jackson Whites"), this track's inclusion was ultimately overruled by committee and cast onto the extras pile. To be honest, I preferred many songs on the extras list compared to some that made the final album cut. I hoped they'd become our traditional, high-quality B-sides. Once I realised there would be no singles released from 'Chutzpah!', I used 'Chutzpah! Jnr' as a means of getting these songs heard.

It may sound like a lop-sided agreement, but I liked working by committee. I was perfectly willing to see the band fly or fall by decree. To me this was true democracy, even in failure. I needed to know if The Wildhearts had what it took for me to truly invest in another round. But The Wildhearts ultimately proved to be extremely shit at making savvy business decisions. It's easier to move on from something with all doubt removed.

**THE SNAKE, THE LION, THE MONKEY AND THE SPIDER**

Ugh. One of the biggest mistakes I ever made was playing The Wildhearts' official third reformation tour sober. It was a depressing enough scenario - a month of tiny shows all around the UK - without also having to endure the process while being sandblasted with reality. I wanted to play a few large shows. Our agent insisted that a ton of small shows would prove more beneficial. It almost killed us.

The band had a far better time of it than me to be honest, with a near 24-hour party happening on and off the bus. While I remember the guys enjoying plenty of high jinx it was still dubbed the 'No Fun At All' tour; I was still in the AA programme and advised by my sponsor to keep my own dressing room free from alcohol and temptation. All it did was alienate me from my tour buddies and stick me in a downward spiral that eventually hit the ground in London.

Backstage, my entire family busied up the room (three kids, one mother, one partner and one ex) as I tried pumping weights as part of my health frenzy. I didn't even notice the depression approaching until about three songs into the set. The floor left my feet and I vanished from the room.

The subsequent *Kerrang!* review accused me of being self-absorbed - or some such callous accusation - and bypassed the very public breakdown going on in full view of over 2,000 people. This song is all about that dreadful episode. Although I'm no longer sure which members of the band represent which animal in the title. Great set of lyrics, mind.

**ALL THAWZEN**

This was another song intended for the solo album that would become '555%'. Instead it was crowbarred into the 'Chutzpah!' sessions to ensure we had enough commercial songs should we need multiple single releases. Which we patiently wouldn't.

One of the great benefits of being sober was a sense that everything stayed as it should. I didn't challenge the typical chaos that normally fuelled me to write furious

words of indignation. Instead I simply let it be. Part of that acceptance will never leave me. But these days I also enjoy a healthy dose of anger that acts like a caffeine blast to the consciousness.

Ultimately, life is about balance. Putting too much weight on either side of the yin/yang equation results in a distorted view of the world around you. I can be angry without being cynical and I can be loving without feeling numb by it. On a purely personal level (and good luck to you in whatever solace you find in life), that choice is paramount to my equilibrium. The choice to, or not to, is essential in my pursuit of meaning. Choosing whether to have a drink or not is a great comfort. Hey, it works for me.

#### VERNIK

The complicated one. Truth is, I had a ton of parts intended for future songs and one day I decided to glue them all together. It's strange to listen to this one and picture myself coming up with the various sections. Parts date as far back to before the birth of my first born son. They are nestled next to parts I came up with while recording it in Denmark - giving the writing of the song a time span of over 10 years.

Subjectively, it's a fascinating song for me. For that purely selfish reason alone, I wish it had made the album. In fact I was quite taken aback when it was voted out considering the blistering performance the band laid down on this track. Deceptively clever and unfairly maligned, I'm still very fond of this song.

#### UNDER THE WAVES

Scott was beavering away in our Denmark squat writing 'The Only One' - the apparently much-needed love song of the album (which, as far as I can recall, I don't actually appear on). I was in the other room writing this utterly unnecessary dance track which the band despised. If I'm writing something I like but others don't, I get ugly baby syndrome. Which makes me feel even more protective about it. Or maybe I just enjoy annoying people? Either way, I insisted that we record this one - much to the umbrage of pretty much everyone in the studio. I still fucking love it, too. Although Scott's song is admittedly the better composition.

#### SOME DAYS JUST FUCKING SUCK

I remember this being entirely a band effort. It was written in our first album rehearsal session. It seemed to have a flow right from the opening riff. I finished the lyrics during a run along East River in Manhattan during a day that frankly sucked because of financial struggles. It was something that plagued my entire stay in NYC. I tried to find work as a songwriter but the entire racket that was already sewn up by about a dozen writers in the whole of the USA.

Money problems are a by-product of living in New York. The hustle to find the rent is part of what unites the city, but it fucking wore me out. The constant chasing of every penny you're owed - all for a brief moment of respite at the start of every month before the cycle started up again - was thoroughly draining. It wasn't until I'd been back in the north of England for a year that I realised why I felt such a sense of release. I wasn't worried about money anymore. Don't get me wrong: the cash

flow still ebbed more than it flowed, but the hustle was absent. If you miss the rent in England it gets tacked onto the next month when you'll probably be able to afford it. In New York, you miss a payment and you're into a mounting pile of debt that only the lottery can fix. Or penning a hit record. And winning the lottery seemed way more likely.

While undoubtedly a great sentiment, 'Some Days Just Fucking Suck' lacks the killer chorus to elevate it into something classic. Instead it's The Wildhearts on top of their game - ultimately playing something slightly substandard to our abilities at the time.

### **ZEEN REQUEST**

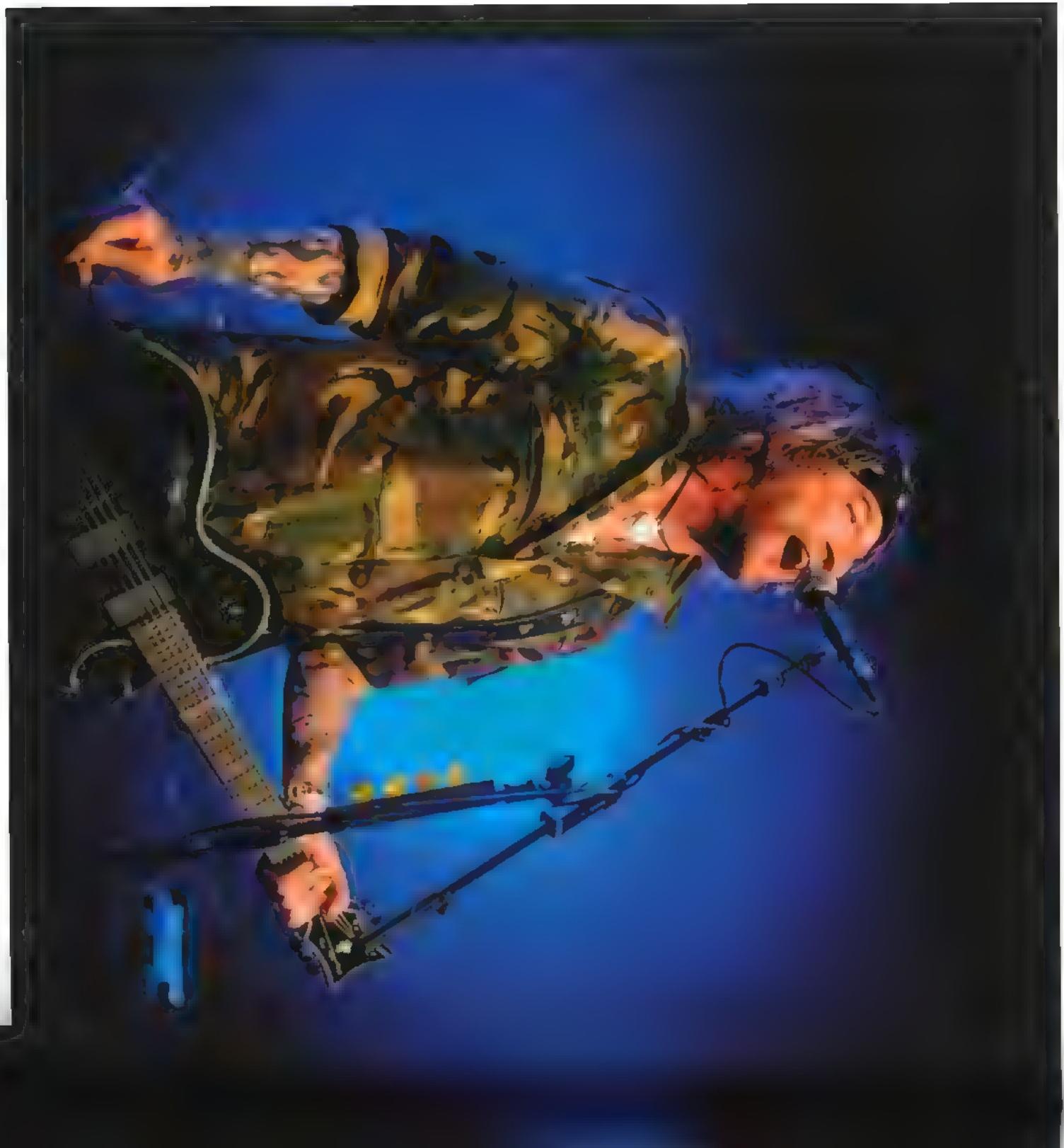
A song originally recorded for the White Album and abandoned - for reasons not entirely clear to me anymore. Maybe the subject matter (the suicide of a great friend) was still too raw for me to deal with in song? Especially at a time when I had enough emotional issues to contend with. I guess you can only juggle so many balls before you've got to put one down. Whatever the reason, I wanted to finally record this for the 'Chutzpah!' sessions. I'm very relieved that we did.

Suicide is a topic that is impossible to approach objectively, such is the vast devastation left in its wake. But I think it's important to remember the absent party with fondness. That's something often lost amid the process of piecing together the lives of those left behind.

It's difficult to rise above anger in the grieving process. But in order to move on from the death of my friend, I had to remember everything I loved about his life: his personality, his teachings and his influence. He was the closest thing I had to a father figure at a time when I desperately needed one. Had I not enjoyed the benefit of his friendship, I have no idea if I'd have gravitated toward crime or still followed a musical path.

How could I be angry at someone who had provided such inspiration to me - a confused young fuck-up who wanted nothing more than to obliterate reality in any way possible? Sure, I still took drugs as a kid, but I had another track running parallel to me that I was able to jump on whenever the right moment arrived. I watched people around me lose interest in their dreams. Our wild young social lives began slowing to a late teenage, rusty old halt. The other track remained shiny, unused, and increasingly attractive. So I jumped.

I will always love and thank Danny Deen (or Zanny Zeen, as he called himself). He was the Frank Zappa figure that I didn't even know I needed so much.





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Where I will leave  
Michael Monroe's  
band, ponder getting  
a real job, have my  
life saved by the  
fans, work with my  
favourite people in  
the world and enter  
into the greatest  
revelation of my  
life so far: that  
I am meant to  
make music.

## FORGET ABOUT IT

After spending an inspiring and unforgettable 18 months playing with Michael Monroe's band, it was time to face a few unavoidable truths. While I couldn't have hoped to play with a better bunch of guys, the days off in Finland were driving me nuts. A week in an apartment in Helsinki with two or three shows interspersed throughout might sound like a breeze. It was, but I wanted to work harder in order to warrant spending time away from my family.

As the only Englishman in the band, I also wanted to be a part of Michael's UK promotion and conduct magazine interviews with friends of mine like Classic Rock, Metal Hammer and Kerrang! magazines. But the opportunity was oddly ignored by Michael's management. In fact all activity seemed to be centred around Michael's one stronghold: Finland.

I didn't understand why someone with such star quality seemed happy to limit his appeal to one small country. Especially as the associated revenue wasn't getting anyone rich. Plus it certainly didn't justify so much time away from seeing my little boy grow up. With all issues taken into consideration, I thought it best to leave the band, return home and look for a job.

When I brought up the subject of leaving music behind and gaining more suitable employment, it was a tearful conversation between Jane and I. But the facts were piling up like the unpaid bills. I'd been trying to make a living as a songwriter and musician for over 20 years, but the industry just wasn't in my corner. I'd watch careers take off by bands that could barely string a song together while I was sitting on over 300 of the fucking things with very little to show for it.

It seemed cruel. But no more cruel than my friends who were denied jobs at Swan Hunter when the arse fell out of the ship building industry in the 1980s. Or when my uncle and my friends' fathers had their livelihoods snatched from them when John Major's Tory reign saw all the last coal mines finally shut down. I'm from a background of hardship; the looming end of my music career seemed a drop in the Tyne by comparison. But the reality hit me hard and we cried at the injustice of it all. Still, there was a family here to look after and that came first. I needed a regular wage.

I asked everyone I knew in the industry if they could look for work in management or production for me. I waited for replies. In this terrifying week of dread and anticipation, two miraculous interventions took place. First Benji Rogers - head of a small company called PledgeMusic - asked me if I'd like to make a fan-funded album. The concept seemed fuzzy (fans pre-ordered an album that hadn't even been recorded yet - how very bizarre!) but I had nothing to lose. If I was going out, then I was going out fighting.

I'd amassed a healthy batch of songs. So with fake bravado I made a Pledge video with my wonderful friend Ash Pears. I asked an invisible crowd of people to invest in a triple album that existed only in my head. I didn't even have a triple album's worth of songs written - of course not - but that didn't deter me from taking the fearful leap into the challenge. Chances were that this crazy idea wouldn't even come off anyway.

The second major contribution in helping me make the next bold step was in the form of advice from another great friend, Jonathan Daniels. He was a very successful New York manager who had been unusually supportive of me on a number of occasions. His advice was this: "Whatever you choose to do for a living, make sure it's something you'd do for free." A nice sentiment, but a little fanciful for my liking. All I'd ever done for free was keep in touch with the fans. As lovely as they were, they certainly weren't going to pay my fucking rent. Right? Wrong!

I once again enlisted the assistance of Gav McCaughey as manager and as soon as the Pledge campaign was launched, my fan base got behind the project in their masses. The initial 100% needed to complete the album was raised quicker than anyone could have possibly expected. Especially considering I had no way of knowing if I'd even make it through the financing stages. The percentage counter continued to increase by the hundreds until we reached 500% in no time - at which point I insisted that - with five being my lucky number - we delete the album at 555%. That way we created the perfect album title and totemistic lucky charm.

Jonathan Daniels predicted correctly - unsurprising for someone with so many successes under his belt. The one service I'd always been happy to conduct for free - ever since logging onto an AOL account in 1998 - had come to save my career, feed my family and give me a fresh perspective on life. And a new level of respect was established for the supporters of my music - far beyond what I ever believed possible. The relationship between my supporters and I will never be taken for granted. For that relationship, I'm the most grateful musician you will ever fucking meet!

So it was with a proud chest full of deeply-inhaled fresh air that I set about compiling 30 songs for the '555%' album. 'Forget About It' was the first brand new song that came to me on a trip to Tesco to buy a bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape with which to celebrate our Pledge victory and position back in the game. The first song was written. Only another 29 to go...

### I-N-T-E-R-N-A-L RADIO

Written based on a chorus that my son Taylor - three-years-old at the time - used to sing around the house. He is actually named as co-writer of this song. I wonder if he's the youngest composer to be officially credited for songwriting?

It can't come as a surprise to anyone who's followed my career that I have quite a few ideas floating around my head all the time. The truth is that I think, see, smell and taste in music. Everything around me has a tune. All I seemingly need to do is require a song and whatever I look at provides one for me. We all have skills and this is mine.

My music has been my best friend, my confidant and my soul mate since I was a little kid. It eased me out of hurtful situations at home and potentially disastrous life choices as a teenager. When I can't think of how to respond, I can write about it. I imagine the relationship is like having a twin. My music knows me better than anyone else. It understands my growth as a human without judgement nor reason. It accepts and encourages who I am. My music is my God.

This is why I am so thankful that my fans have allowed me to continue to indulge in my passion. Losing the ability to make music for me would be every bit as painful as losing a sibling. I hope no-one takes that as a glib and emotionless statement. Without the ability to express myself in this way, I would simply cease to exist as the person I know myself to be. It is that fundamental.

### LIE WHEN YOU TELL ME THE TRUTH

Originally written for a Japanese artist who required something like a pop version of The Wildhearts. Yet it was ultimately rejected for being too poppy and sounding too much like The Wildhearts. You figure that one out. Still, I was thrilled to be able to unearth this to be part of the '555%' album.

It was also a pleasant excuse to work with Ritch Battersby again. I planned the album recording to be split over three sessions – originally with three different producers – and I had three drummers earmarked for the recording of the album. Ritch agreed to take session two. Alongside Mr Battersby, I planned on approaching Denzel and original Therapy? drum master Fyfe Ewing to take part. So I was overjoyed when all three accepted the task.

Obviously I deliberately kept the most Wildhearts-sounding ('to my mind, at least) songs for Ritch to play. I set up in my favourite studio in the UK – The Chairworks – in Castleford, West Yorkshire. With my old friend Willie Dowling producing, we strapped ourselves in for a most enjoyable session.

### INCIDENTAL NOISES

Featuring Fyfe Ewing on drums, this is a song that was written as part of a '50 Songs In 50 Days' project – something that I embarked on to stay focused when first struggling to stay sober in New York. The plan was simple: wake up and feel the music. Write some preliminary chord structures, hit the gym, hit a meeting, come back to write some lyrics to establish a melody, hit another meeting, then demo the song in the evening. For 50 days I did this. Every single day. It helped me concentrate and stay active in a city where inactivity could easily invite the devil into your life. I loved being in New York. Whilst there, I felt like I was missing nothing that was going on elsewhere in the world. It felt like a creative epicentre that not only fed my need for inspiration, but helped with my sobriety in a way that no other place could. It made me want to be better.

Every morning as I walked to an AA meeting, I'd have the subject matter for that day's song. I would chew it over in my head until melody lines were formed and lyrical phrases were mentally written. By my second meeting of the day, the song structure was completed. Very few of the songs on '555%' vary from their original demo versions. Although Willie Dowling was responsible for some amazing musical additions to the existing arrangements.

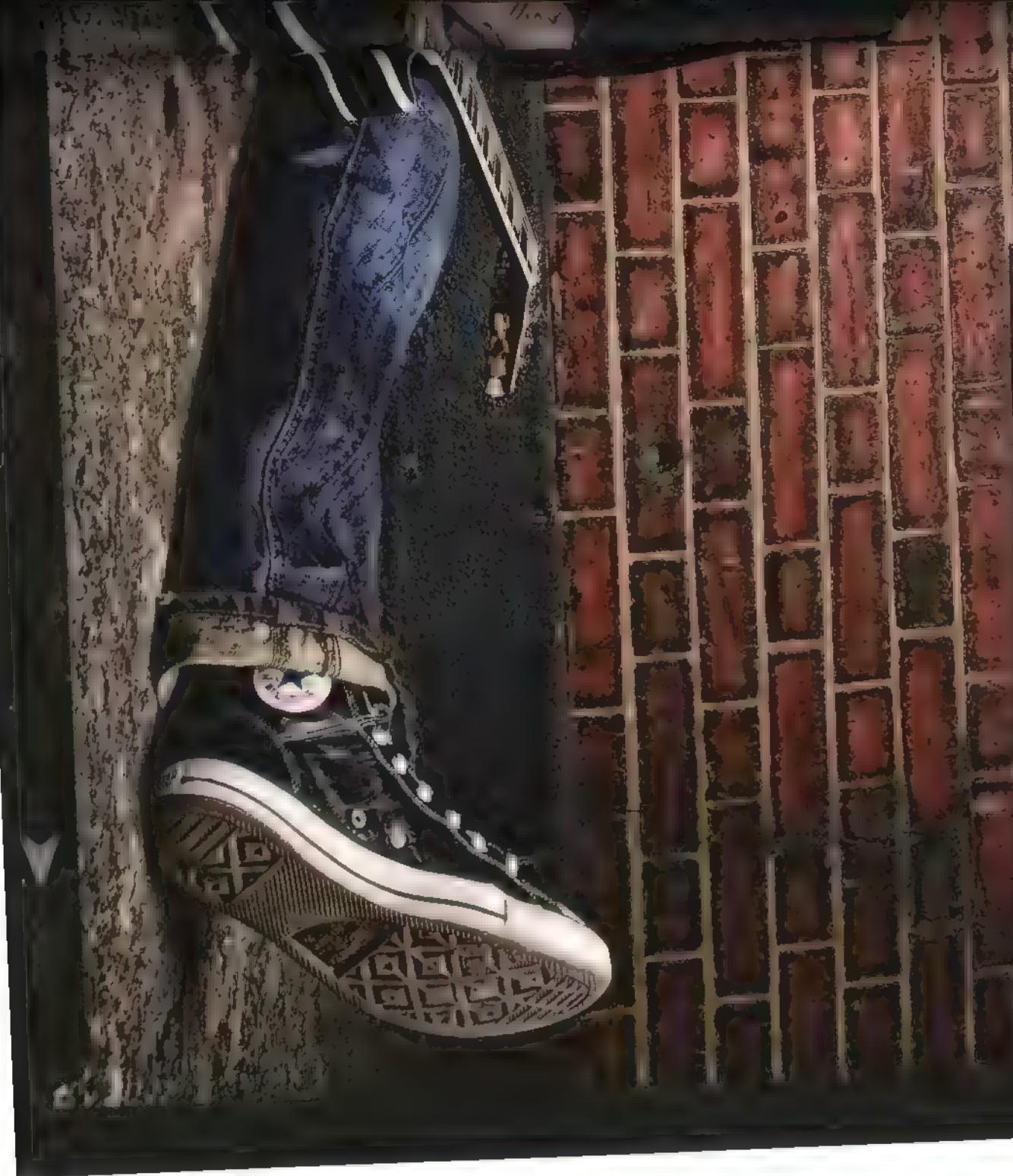
'Incidental Noises' remains identical to its demo recording. Although Victoria Liedtke provided a far stronger and more seductive octave vocal in the verse than my original squawking effort.



KEEP CLEAR

TURNING GAY

DON'T EVEN THINK  
OF PARKING HERE



## IT APPEARS THAT THE PARTY IS OVER

It was at a Reverend Horton Heat show – with Nashville Pussy and Hank Williams III supporting – that I realised I wasn't going to stay sober as long as my fellow A.A. friends in attendance that evening. I'd never felt so uncomfortable in my own skin as I did, nursing a Diet Pepsi and watching three amazing bands play music for drinkers.

Thing is, as a non-drinker, you visit the bar maybe twice during the whole evening. There's nothing there for you other than a means of rehydration. The bar – usually colourfully alive and inviting – is a joyless refuge for the sober. Yet I still kept it in my line of vision out of habit, and a sense of loss.

Whilst Hank III ran straight from playing country songs into a trash set onstage, I watched people at the bar laugh and have fun while they ordered more rounds of shots. It was there I spotted Joe Coleman, one of my favourite artists in the world. Unable to pass up a chance to show my appreciation for his incredible, controversial and uniquely detailed paintings, I charged to the bar, introduced myself and asked if I could buy him a drink. He accepted. As he held his shot of whiskey in front of me, wondering where mine was with which to clink cheers, I told him I was sober.

His look of nonchalant confusion struck a raw nerve. It saw me bid farewell, exit the venue and walk home feeling like I was dragging around a dead horse everywhere I went. I was talking the talk and not listening to a word. And I was lying to myself.

'It Appears That The Party Is Over' came to me on that walk home. I realised that I'd rather be drinking with Joe Coleman than living up to an imaginary standard that I'd set for myself. Fuck the future. The present sucked.

## DEEP IN THE ARMS OF MORPHEUS

The first song I ever wrote for The Wildhearts that sprawled over the five-minute mark. It was something that we were unable to perform at the time, due to both our fledgling talents and limited ambition as a new band. I had no intention of digging it up for this album until I asked if CJ would come over to Denmark and appear on three songs. When he asked which songs he'd be playing, this title immediately came to mind. Imagine having Ritch, CJ and Jon Poole appear on a Wildhearts track that was over 25 years old!

"That would be fucking righteous!" I thought. I was right.

Complete with the production skills of 'Chutzpah!' producer Jacob Hansen (albeit with a nice apartment booked half a mile away from his lodgings this time), the song came together through blood, sweat and one hell of a lot of tuning problems. Jacob is an obsessive when it comes to guitars being in tune. Things I would happily allow on an album won't leave his studio. In fact we ardently tracked the verses to this song one string at a time. I'd heard about Def Leppard enduring a similar technique with Mutt Lange – for an entire album! One verse, cut and pasted. Almost fucking killed me with boredom.

What Jacob brings to the table in technological genius (which is plenty), he

sometimes loses in glossing over the magic of a human feel that makes things breathe. In the panic to complete 30 songs on schedule, a lack of soul is the main regrettable element that I can hear peppering these songs from time to time.

### BABY SKIES

A title suggested by Ritch Battersby, because of the sheer amount of parts in this song that at times resembled learning 'Sky Babies' during The Wildhearts 'PHUQ' sessions. You want self-indulgent, protracted and complex fun? Then just stick Jon Poole, Ritch Battersby and me in a room together. The likelihood of a traditional arrangement leaving the building is as likely as us not enjoying our time together.

Based on another of the '50 In 50' songs, we tore this one apart and reassembled it as a 'Bohemian Rhapsody' version of the original song that owed more to 'The Cars. All I can hear when I listen to this is laughter at the sheer audacity of having so much fun making music. To this day – and for the rest of my life – if I'm not enjoying myself as much as I was when arranging this ridiculous song then I'll walk. Life is too short to work with people who don't make you smile.

### SILENCE

Originally written for a Finnish band looking for a more commercial direction. The demos were recorded by Jason Sanderson in deepest Barnsley (a South Yorkshire town which joy seems yet to infiltrate), the version on '555%' lacks the depth and density of the original demo.

My initial idea was to have the actual demo appear on this triple album along with a number of unreleased songs. But as the budget increased then so did my ambitions. The decision was made to re-record every song afresh. Not every song fully benefitted from this approach. It was a chance I took. But given the same choices again, I would take it every time.

Again produced by Jacob Hansen, I'd originally pencilled in Ralph Jezzard to produce all of the tracks that feature Ritch Battersby, given Ralph's amazing track record with The Wildhearts in the past.

I also wanted to hold out an olive branch to Ralph – with whom I'd still not fully made up since our post-'Valor Del Corazon' fall-out. It got pretty nasty, not to mention personal. Way too personal in fact to go into detail here. Mainly as it involves people who have requested this period not to be mentioned in this book in order to avoid legal ramifications.

Suffice it to say, Ralph still wasn't the easiest person with whom to make arrangements. He insisted on points (percentages) on any songs he recorded.

The fact of the matter is that the triple album was deleted at '555%', never to be commercially released. So we had no way of knowing which songs would make the truncated version as they would be voted by the fans themselves. Making demands on percentage ownership at such an early stage would have been a messy legal nightmare.

I will always wish that Ralph had got involved in '555%', allowing us to repair the friendship from which we'd valued and benefitted so much in the past. But the truth is that times had moved on. Recordings weren't released in the same tradition as the golden age of percentage deals - when producers could earn handsomely from successful albums reaching gold or platinum status. Music was entering a new age (the digital age) and PledgeMusic was the face of the new business model. People had to agree to make albums for a fixed fee. They didn't know if an album would actually get a commercial release or even make the intended target for the recording budget. It was all a gamble. I stood to lose more than anyone; people would need to be paid in full, whatever the final budget.

Still, a great chance was passed up as far as I'm concerned. I guess I'll always regret having my dream compromised by the unavoidable decision to record the triple album with only two producers instead of three. But if that decision could have been avoided, it would have been.

### **POWDERING**

Another song from the Willie Dowling/Fyfe Ewing sessions. It replaced the dreamy Stone Roses-vibe of the demo with a more straightforward Beatles approach. Very much Willie's style. I loved working with Willie. His hands-on manner made for a very easy life. He took hold of the steering wheel and allowed the players to take a backseat. I enjoyed this method of production leadership immensely. It gave me the chance to simply concentrate on the performance and I was more than willing to accept changes in style if it meant getting the job done with quality. Working with Willie, that was never a concern.

His professionalism saved the day on more than a few occasions when the task of laying down 30 songs simply got a little overwhelming for me. Of course we butted heads from time to time, but only when it came to agreeing on specific parts. Willie is a band leader and so am I. Believing that this wouldn't cause the occasional bouts of friction would have been sheer stupidity.

Still, our disagreements were always of a creative nature. They never spilled into anything personal. We had a job to do and part of my job was retaining the original spirit of the song wherever absolutely necessary.

The fact that this song proved to be so popular makes me happy that I gave over control in this instance. Making music is often about compromise. Sometimes.

### **TIME**

My favourite song of the entire collection and the first one on the triple album to feature Denzel on drums. Another way to ensure that any songwriting rulebook is torched with the ashes discarded to the wind is to put Chris Catalyst, Jon Poole, Denzel and I together and lock the door. Being Cardiacs fans and time signature freaks, the results are always hilariously inappropriate and deliciously rewarding.

I'd been documenting the songs on the Garageband app as quickly as I was writing them. I leant towards the completion of 10 songs at a time to ensure total focus was maintained throughout the individual recording sessions. Between the second

session (featuring Ritch) and the third session (to feature Denzel), the hard drive on my computer went down. It took with it all the demos for the entire third session – due to take place in January 2012. I lost everything.

I had a Christmas holiday booked with my family. The intention was to chill out completely from the hectic recording process of 2011 and clear my mind in readiness for the final session. Instead my holiday was spent frantically writing 10 brand new songs as the family frolicked in the sunshine. I recalled roughly one percent of the material demoed. The rest was a blur. I had to construct brand new compositions for the rehearsals that would be taking place as soon as I got home. In a way I think this made the final session fresher and more spontaneous and as such, my favourite of the three. ‘Time’ is the sound of four guys having just about as much fun as is entirely legal.

This is one of my favourite set of lyrics that I have written. The subject is the ageing process. It’s something that for me has always yielded valuable fruit by its mercurial definition and the difference in perception as one gets older. There is a wisdom in this song which I feel I was assisted with due to the very nature of its birth. Namely a philosophical approach to the completion of 10 new songs while on holiday. This philosophical attitude sure beat allowing anger and frustration a seat at the creative table – which could easily have happened under the circumstances.

When it came to touring the album later in 2012 and 2013, Rich Jones joined the band as guitarist. He seemed to be the only band member not present on ‘555%’.

Except that he did actually appear on the album, as he later hilariously revealed.

Rich was in Berlin at the same time we were recording in Denmark. So we asked him to have someone translate “time to fuck off” into German and have them record it for the middle section of the song. Unable to find anyone willing to perform the line, he took it upon himself to do it. He would not confess this until well after the release of the album ‘100%’ – on which I’m relieved to say – the fans chose this song to appear. Another reason to love Rich Jones, should more reasons ever be needed.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN:  
555% (PART II)

## **ANOTHER SPINNING FUCKING RAINBOW**

If you have an Apple Mac computer then you already know what this song is about. If you don't, let me explain. When a Mac decides it's having trouble processing the most simple of commands (such as acting like a fucking computer instead of some kind of surveillance appliance), the cursor turns into a multi-coloured miniature beachball that idly spins around, rendering any basic command impossible and thus informing you that your expensive laptop is in fact just another piece of overpriced shit from the ever-devolving Apple corporation.

I had this chorus knocking around for years - wondering if it would make it onto a second Howling Willie Cunt album - until the '555%' opportunity granted me a thorough clean-out of ideas from the attic. So I added it to the party. Grabbing ideas anywhere and everywhere was the most liberating process I'd ever known. It continued working itself out right up until the last moment, as in the case of 'Another Spinning Fucking Rainbow'.

We even wrote in our Danish rented apartment (wisely procured to avoid a return to Jacob's sub-standard accommodation, an experience I didn't want to put vocalist Victoria Liedtke through). Chris, Jon and I sat drinking strange alcoholic beverages of no obvious source or flavour and scribbled lyric ideas until late in the evening. By morning we had the song nailed.

I absolutely love this track and would have liked for it to have been a single. But I was (wisely, in hindsight) talked out of pursuing the idea due to the expletive nature of its chorus. Still, the best overall band performance of the album for my money. This one stinks of groove.

## **WESTWARD HO! (A New Reputation)**

Messing around with this song's verse while we were still living in New York, Jane remarked that it sounded like the theme tune to the 80s kids TV show Fraggle Rock, at which point it became an instant keeper. I don't always appreciate comparisons to other songs, but I loved that show and was more than happy with this comparison. All I needed was a way of making it work within a song.

I swear I was writing this one right up until the wire. Every stage of its conception - from rhythm tracks to final lyrics - were hastily cobbled together. Thankfully the lovely Laila K - of Sonic Boom Six - added a final vocal and the picture was eventually complete.

In the wake of 'The Streets' influence on urban music, the last thing I wanted to do was make something that sought "authenticity", I favoured a tongue-in-cheek approach that I believed would age far better in the long run. I wanted to go Disney instead; it suited my Monty Python sense of humour better than attempting something 'cool'.

This caused the biggest argument of the session between Willie and I. He hated the middle section, insisting that we jazz up the chord progression. I was adamant it would stay as it was. So we battled verbally like two old geese scrabbling over a piece of stale bread. I can only surmise that we must have just been exhausted by being

pushed against the clock. A studio full of personnel stood around in awkward and confused silence - presumably wondering what the fuck we were bickering about. Willie eventually capitulated and I got my own way. As I've said before, I'm usually very flexible. Musical arrangements were normally up for discussion by everyone but on rare occasions, my wishes were of fundamental importance.

I dearly wanted to play '555%' in its entirety in a live environment. But I would never have attempted it without Willie's involvement, such was his presence on the album. I presume that our studio disagreements were the main reason he turned down the offer of working with me again once these sessions were over, and a live rendition of the album never came about. An unfortunate situation for sure, but the truth of the matter was that these were my songs, and sometimes, however rarely, my word was the final one.

I'm ultimately very happy with this song. Laila's gorgeous vocals complete the ever-mutating picture and Victoria's impromptu gospel performance in the middle section is one of the most astounding things I've ever been privy to in a studio environment.

### **DO THE LONELY SUFFER MORE, OR LESS, OR JUST THE SAME AT THE POINT OF DEATH?**

Another song that I wish had been voted for inclusion on the fan-chosen '100%' album, although I can see why it didn't fully connect with the listeners.

Straying from the far darker demo version of the song, this new version sonically belies the pitch-black subject matter. Which, in my opinion, now shows the song in an inappropriate light.

I will attempt to explain. I didn't intend for this song to be a pleasant listening experience. Based on my experience as a child in a home of domestic violence, my sister and I would spend sleepless nights as my mother held our hands and searched for hidden battered wives' shelters in the dark. The inhabitants hoping that they wouldn't be found by their drunken husbands who had necessitated the hunt for a secret location. Which sometimes happened.

Mother and two kids sleeping in a single bed in run-down sanctums with dogs charging about the place. It was a petrifying ordeal for a child to experience. God only knows the terror of mothers trying to protect their children. Beaten and bruised, these brave women would suffer the kind of abuse that would be illegal nowadays. But due to the archaic laws of the time, domestic violence was allowed to take place within the walls of the home. Just as long as it wasn't taken outside.

It was a night facing just such injustice when the police called round simply because of a neighbour's complaint about our broken front door. My mother's second husband threatened to exact revenge on her kids once the police had left the house. He pointed to a knife he'd stashed under a bed, motioning to my sister and me. In a blind panic, my mother grabbed the huge knife - while the police presence was still at least a form of protection - and ran the large blade straight through her husband's fat gut. As my sister and I cowered in our bedroom, the door flew open and in stumbled this animal of a man with the shaft of the huge knife sticking out

of his belly. Enormous gouts of blood sprayed against the bedroom wall. I remember feeling relieved.

My mother was taken away and charged with wounding with intent (one crime below manslaughter). That was later reduced to grievous bodily harm, due to the fact that the horrible cunt lived. I'm very happy to say - as laid out in the lyrics - that they successfully divorced. He later died alone in his tiny single-white-psychopath council flat, his lungs having slowly collapsed. I can only hope that it was a painful and protracted death and I wish I could have been there to assist.

So yeah, the song does sound way too jolly for the subject matter. But unless you'd been through such an ordeal, how would you possibly know how dark the production should have been?

#### THE OTHER SIDE

I really didn't have much belief in this song until it came time for Victoria to make an appearance. The shifting chord progressions showcased her vocal range beyond anything I'd hoped. It was a philosophical set of lyrics written in reaction to the heavily religious aspects of the A.A. programme. I personally liked the lyrics but I wasn't sure anyone else would even care about them. Over the years I've got used to people dismissing lyrics in favour of a heavy riff or a fast pace. I often expect deeper lyrical meanings to be ignored as par for the course. Obviously I had a serious aversion to the religious side of sobriety. I would try to attend as many different meetings outside of my main group as possible. I wanted to find something that didn't reek of mind control. But I would still come up against a cultish stonewalling that reminded me of the Jehovah's Witness nutjobs who used to turn up at my door when I first moved to London. I loved scaring those guys - which I managed to do just by acting weirdier than them. I invited them in to discuss aliens. I considered it sport. But the overtly Christian policies inherent with New York sobriety were harder to fight off.

Discussion wasn't offered as an option; there was merely a blanket manifesto largely based on Christian conditioning. I'm sorry, but as soon as anyone mentions hell, my shutters go up and I can't take the conversation seriously any more. One too many fundamentalists stopped making sense as far as I was concerned.

Chris Catalyst was the first to point out that he enjoyed the lyrics, which surprised me. Then the album's mastering engineer - the vastly experienced and talented Jon Astley - made a point of telling me how much he liked the song. I was further taken aback. Finally, Ritch Battersby - certainly not a man known for gushing about anything - called me to tell me how much he loved the way the vocals sat together. Considering the subject matter, I couldn't have been more shocked if I'd received a letter of approval from the Pope.

'The Other Side' was another that fell through the net when compiling the '100%' album. But the fact that this song boasts a high calibre of supporters makes it impossible to argue with.

## **STRANGE NEW YEAR**

At the time of writing this song, I was experiencing my first sober Christmas at home in New York, with a house full of teetotal friends. Furthermore, I was involved with a charity for which I'd deliver food to New York's elderly and infirm. I also celebrated the arrival of the New Year at an extremely welcoming AA-designated household and later saw in 2007 by serving the homeless at a soup kitchen. A strange New Year? I'd not seen another quite as unique - nor as beautiful - in my life. Penning a song about my feelings came as easy as waking up on January 1st without a hangover.

Writing the lyrics to this song was effortless. In fact the words seemed like they were queueing up to get out of my head: each line rhymed with the last in a creative purge of affection for my current situation. The performance followed suit with a first-take vocal that required no second run.

I always doubted songs that come this easily. So as I return to listen to this now, the suspicion is that its very automatic composition masks a slapdash approach and we neglected to plug in the quality barometer that day. But all I hear is a near-perfect little song. In the performance of the musicians, the intention of the narrative, and the quality of production values, it works as if on greased rails. Typically, this seems under loved by most. Naturally, that just makes me love it more.

## **LOVER, IT'LL ALL WORK OUT**

A late re-write of this song transformed it from a tale of struggle to something far more touching. The resulting track is all the better for the intervention. At the time of its completion, I was planning for the Pledge campaign (that would change my life) and I was completely broke. Child support and general day-to-day living was proving too much of an assault course. My family was struggling to exist and the future looked bleak. All I could do was offer Jane the cold comfort that I would try my best to make things work out. Whatever happened in my fortunes as a musician, my family would be taken care of. This was my oath. The change in lyric brought a tear to my eye and I figured that if it made me feel such emotions, it might have a knock on effect to some listeners.

Boy, was that true.

Probably the most instant of all the songs on '555%', this poignant confessional immediately spoke to more people than pretty much anything I'd written to date. This is a song of determination in the face of almost certain defeat and patently I wasn't alone in my situation.

The telephone call in the middle of the song acts as an unnecessary piece of comedy relief that should never have been allowed to take place! But we were on a tight schedule and were open for anything - even putting a silly drama scene in a song about working class values and financial struggle. The benefit of hindsight is of little benefit at all, is it? We all possess 20/20 vision after the fact.

## ILLUMINATING TIMOS

I ended my addiction to crack cocaine on December 18th, 2004, but that wouldn't be the last time I'd buy it. When I first moved to New York - before finding out about Jane's pregnancy - I visited the Rodeo Bar on 3rd Avenue with a friend. When he left, I continued to drink, enjoying the company and the vast array of cocktails to the hilt. Beyond the hilt, as it goes. I don't remember the exact details but I ended up so wasted that I decided to hit the streets of NYC and score some rock (crack). Presumably to enjoy the old school thrill of finding drugs in strange places - I don't exactly recall.

Whatever the reasons - or potentially dangerous circumstances - I was obviously successful. I came back to reality with lungs full of smoke in the spare room of the friends I was staying with. That first hit sobered me up to the point of shock. I freaked out. I realised that I was simply too scared to smoke crack anymore. Normally I'd load as much of the drug onto the pipe as gravity would allow, but this time I barely covered the surface of the bowl. I was unsure of how much was safe. Safety and drug use was a brand new partnership to me.

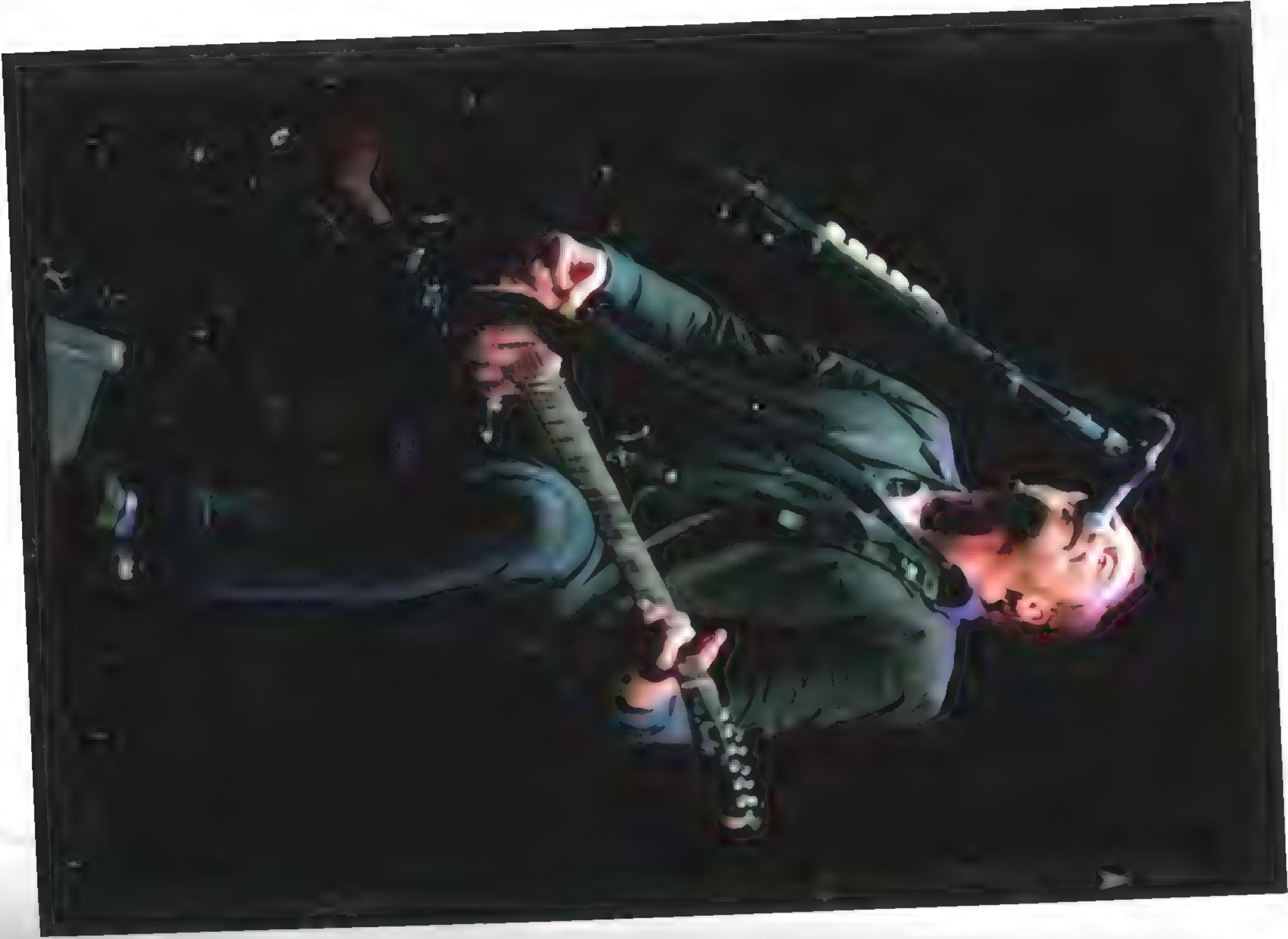
For the first time in my life I took the rocks and flushed them down the toilet. The next day I called my friend Scott Metzger - himself a staunch member of the AA programme - and asked him to take me to a meeting. I stayed in the programme for 18 months and have never smoked crack since that day. I've only told a few people this story, but figured that this is surely the place for confessions. Today I would rather die than hit the pipe, although I suspect the two would be instrumentally linked.

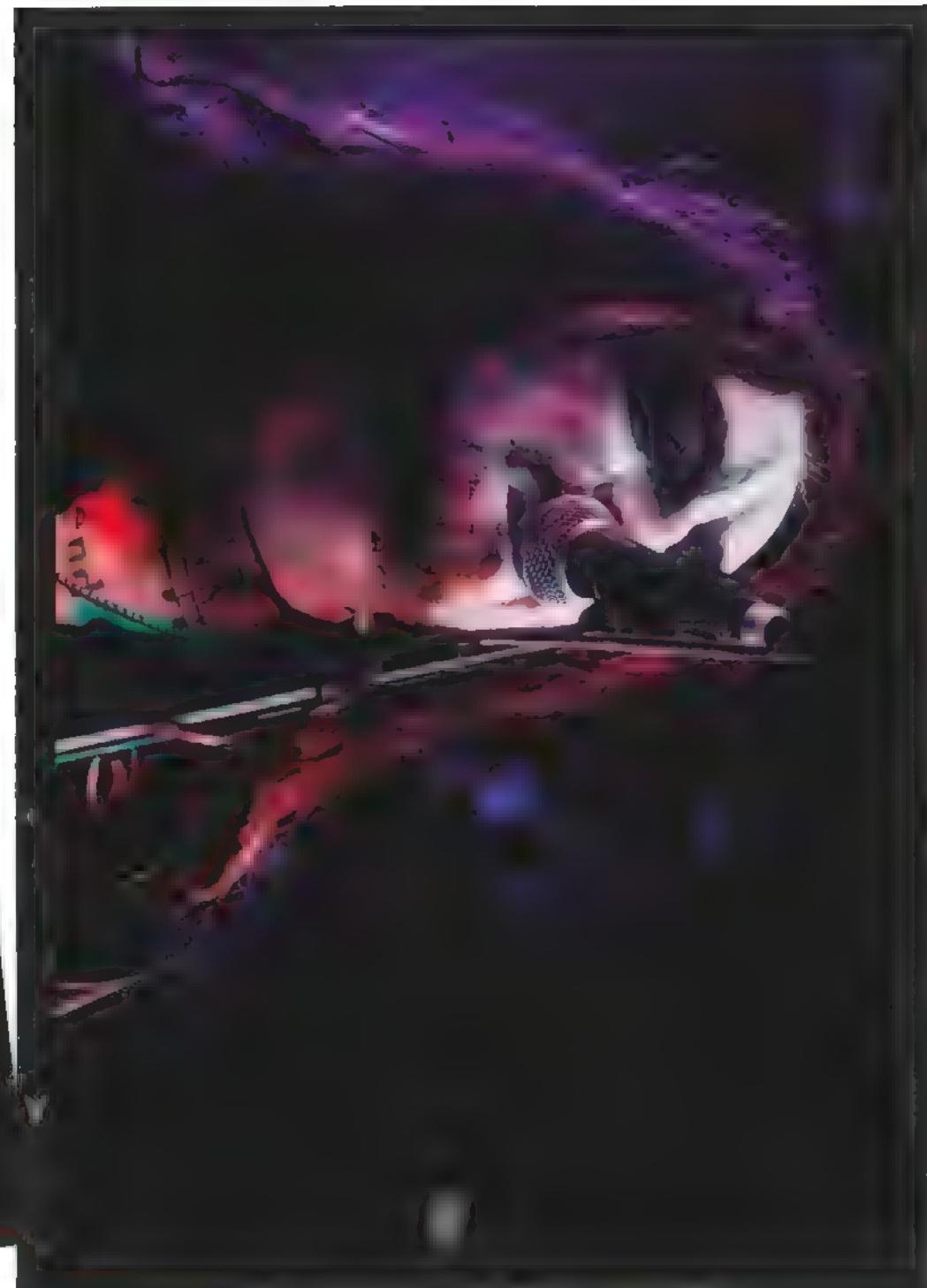
## BEGIN FROM WITHIN

This was taken from an entirely different style of song altogether. It was written about life on the island of New York. I decided that stripping the song back to a pounding dance track would be a fresh challenge. And I needed a subject that I could get passionate enough to make a single note vocal work over a four-on-the-floor beat.

Late one night whilst recording '555%' session two in Denmark, the subject matter materialised: the desire to be a better father to my children than the three men who had represented that figure in my own life. The first, my biological father (whereabouts unknown) left at an early age, never to contact his children again. Not even a birthday card. It wasn't difficult to be a greater man than him; all I had to do was actually love my kids - which I will do until the end of my days.

My sister, a nurse, happened to be looking after one of our distant uncles. He was the brother of my original father. In a state of almost total immobility, her patient tried to communicate. When asked the whereabouts of our father, he made the faint gesture of looking to the ceiling while marking a cross to his chest. A signal that our father had passed away without anyone knowing? His family never kept in touch throughout our lives and we wouldn't have known our dad if he'd sat next to my sister and I on the bus. What kind of man could take out the pain of divorce - however messy - on the emotions of two children? Needless to say, any official





reporting of this coward's death would have meant little more than an excuse to buy some good champagne as far as I was concerned.

The second person (dead, hopefully in an agonising fashion) to occupy this spot was the psychopath. To serve a more positive and loving effect than this cunt would be pretty easy. All I'd have to do is make my children believe that I wasn't about to murder them on any given evening.

The third (sadly no longer alive) was a good man who treated my mother well. Sadly, he was a tough bloke and unable to display any affection or support to his adopted son. One evening back home, The Wildhearts appeared on *Top Of The Pops* (the now legendary British TV chart show) and blasted my music into our living room. Instead of praise, he offered the reaction of: "You're not much of a singer or a frontman, are you David?" This was simply his manner. Mine was not a typical vocation for our area. I battled on despite his lack of encouragement, in an effort that echoed the Johnny Cash song, 'A Boy Named Sue'. I think I owe him for instilling my attitude of not giving a fuck what a critic thinks - good or bad - which has served me long and well.

I like this song very much and would have featured it in my choice if I'd personally cherry-picked tracks for the abridged '100%' album. Given the non-traditional style of the song, I wasn't surprised that the fans didn't share my enthusiasm.

### **RETURN OF THE NORTHERN CARDINAL**

Back in my one bedroom apartment on East 3rd Street and Avenue B, I'd be woken each day by an exotic little red bird that would sing to me on my fire escape. Same time every morning. Rain or shine. When I researched this unlikely-looking species of New York City inhabitant, I discovered it to be a male northern cardinal. They are more common to the open spaces of Texas and Mexico than the claustrophobic metropolitan district of the Big Apple.

It appeared unnaturally tame and I took great comfort that he seemed to share my foreign status as a visitor to the city. I'd play my guitar to him and he'd sing back, encouraging the communal garden area outside my window to occasionally burst into song.

I welcomed his early morning alarm call like the kiss of a child. I even wrote the chord structure and middle melody of the song in his honour and as a soundtrack to the unborn child in Jane's womb. Imagining our son to be the inquisitive type (boy, was that ever accurate), I pictured him in my imagination as I composed and demoed the song. I especially enjoyed the simple middle eight that represented a child walking along, curious of everything in his range of vision. This middle section was a piece of music that comforted me greatly in the months alone. It was also another point of contention in the studio as Willie insisted the melody be more complex, or "interesting." I couldn't make him understand the importance of this piece of music to me. As uneventful as it evidently seemed, changing it was not an option. This piece was staying exactly as it was intended.

The addition of a Jew's harp was a compromise that I regret making. In fact I wish this song hadn't featured on '555%' at all. As with the song, 'After All You

Said About Cowboys' (which was recorded for '555%' but would feature on a later album instead), the demo versions had a very dense style – owing more to classic underground US band Grandaddy than to the Beatles' Bungalow Bill.

Incidentally, both 'Return Of The Northern Cardinal' and 'After All You Said About Cowboys' were written on the same day, but the latter was deliberately omitted from the triple album because I was unhappy with the final results. While I'd liked to have done the same with 'Return Of The Northern Cardinal' – a very personal composition – it was needed to complete the intended collection of 30 titles.

Still, it didn't make the '100%' album so perhaps I'll re-record it some day?

### TASTE AVERTION

This is a strange one. I honestly thought this song would be binned right until the point of rehearsing and arranging it, which I did together with Jon Poole, Chris Catalyst and Denzel. Something about this simple melody juxtaposed with the surreal lyrics kept it from leaving my head. It wasn't until I was given the chance to take it apart and rebuild it as an entirely different animal that the tune took on a life of its own.

Just as with 'Time', the band had a field day with 'Taste Aversion' and it shows. Led by the limitless imagination of Mr. Poole and the breathless chemistry of this excitable four-man team, this is still my favourite writing partnership of any I've enjoyed in my years as a musician. I feel almost guilty that I probably enjoy the music we make together more than any of my fans.

I still laugh at the "operatic" part in the bizarre middle section of the song as Jon, Victoria and I attempted to decipher a YouTube clip of Treeman (AKA The Angriest Guitar Player In The World) singing his original composition 'Magic Man'.

I credited Treeman as a co-writer on this song and later invited him to see us play the track live when supporting Slash in London. It turned out that the "angriest guitar player in the world" was an extremely lovely gentleman who simply couldn't spot his contribution to the song – even after I later sent him a copy of the triple album. I'm really glad that the listeners picked this song for '100%'. It really would have been a criminal waste to let this one go without being cherished.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN:  
555% (PART III)

## **YOU'RE THE ONE, YOU'RE THE ONE, YEAH I KNOW YOU'RE THE ONE, YOU'RE THE ONE (Yeah, I Know You're The One)**

A veritable mutt of a song, cobbled together from a myriad of conflicting parts. It only worked as a whole thanks to the sum of its parts: the complete collective energy of everyone involved. The final effort was a joy as a direct result.

The song is about finally giving in to being in love with Jane – which I eventually did – forever and without further struggle. Resistance was annoyingly natural to me, so acceptance was like getting a puppy as a gift. After the initial fear of responsibility settled in my stomach, this new arrival instantly ingratiated itself, metaphorically leaping onto my lap and licking my face. Acceptance came with the understanding that this gift would grow larger and its love would remain unconditional. Before long it started to feel warming in a way that had been missing from my life for so long.

I can hear nothing but joy and affection in the very structure of this track. Mixing disco beats with pop rock, this sunny grab-bag was still being written as I stood in the vocal booth in Willie Dowling's French studio retreat, frantically scribbling lyrics on a sheet of A4 while singing. It's a pleasing piece of fluff that I'm not surprised was picked up immediately by the listeners. There's nothing much to dislike about puppies.

## **BEAUTIFULLY, BLISSFULLY UNSETTLED**

I don't understand why this song is not only so popular, but also overtook some far superior (in my opinion) songs in the voting process for '100%'. I guess the band (CJ, Ritch Battersby and Jon Poole) lend a Wildhearts feel to this by-the-numbers-run-through-the-generic-gamut of chord progressions? Don't get me wrong, I think it's a perfectly competent – albeit perfunctory – composition that crams in everything from naughty words to straight ahead rock diversions. Much like a regular Wildhearts B-side. It eventually ends up back at square one without demanding too much attention from the listener. I get it. Pleasing everyone is disconcertingly easy sometimes. I just wish it took more than a riff and a chorus. Personally speaking, this song sits in my top five personal low points of the '555%' album. I suspect this admission will surprise more than a few people. But I think it's only fair that, as songwriters, we are allowed to dislike some of our own songs, right?

## **CONFUSION**

The song that almost drove Willie to the point of insanity. I originally wrote this track in New York, during the '50 In 50' period with Jon Poole fully in mind. I absolutely intended to have Jon sing this. I even tried him out with it at one point, much to his chagrin.

I couldn't face putting the poor fellow through further misery of singing against his will, so I planned to get in touch with Blur guitarist Graham Coxon to ask him to sing it. He was someone whose music Jon had turned me onto in 2004. I imagine the only people in the UK who are less helpful than Graham Coxon himself are the people who handled Graham Coxon's management at the time. Utterly useless fucking cunts. The type of people who would inform the fire brigade of a burning house once the smouldering rubble had cooled down. They seemed reluctant to assist in any

way. They eventually stated that, "Graham sometimes takes a long time to reply." But they simply failed to let us know that he didn't want to do it, which was all that the session needed.

The song remained without vocals for weeks until I eventually got so frustrated by this failure in basic communication that I laid down the vocals myself. I'm expecting a reply from Graham any day now.

When it came to mixing it, I had a very definite sound in mind. One that I was sure Willie wasn't hearing. That's fine - everyone hears music in different ways - none better or worse than each other. But this was a very definite request that simply didn't match Willie's richer and more textured approach. I wanted a raw mix and was adamant that this was important to the song. I offered to take the track and mix it myself, but Willie insisted that he would realise my vision - eventually.

He sweated bullets over mix after mix, until there were almost 30 different mixes of the track - all very similar yet stylishly opposing what I needed to hear. It became difficult to tell them apart and the process became finally unbearable for all concerned. In the end I actually feared for Willie's peace of mind so I mixed the song with Jase Edwards, achieving the desired results within a couple of hours. It was definitely the humane thing to do.

One of the enduring disagreements between Willie and I was my love for distortion, which he considered to be "spoiling the song". As a fan of Ministry and Granddaddy (while Willie favoured The Beach Boys and The Beatles), I saw this as simply a difference in sonic opinion. I had no intrinsic problem with that, especially as his levels of musical talent overrides mine immeasurably. But when something calls for noise, then it takes a lover of noise to understand and take command.

Willie is a true musician's musician, as opposed to someone with an ear for music, like myself. I presume that Willie will never live long enough to understand my love for distortion but I'm sure that he loses very little sleep over it. Still, I did hate having to watch him try to understand while working on this track. To this day I can't enjoy listening to this song.

### SLEEPING IN THE LIGHT

Case in point: I gave complete musical control to Willie for this orchestral composition and he brought home something that I consider genius of a John Barry quality. The complexity baffles me within an inch of my own sanity.

Jaw-dropping stuff that illustrates his range and ability as an almost peerless musical composer. In fact I've only witnessed Tim Smith enjoy a similar adeptness at constructing string sections. Frightening. But very, very impressive.

'Sleeping In The Light' was another song I wrote while walking through Manhattan to yet another AA meeting. I can vividly remember the weather that night; the street intersection at which the chorus lyric arrived; even the face of the taxi driver that almost ran me down while singing the melody line into my dictaphone. Writing has a knack of doing that: attaching photographic memories to sections of songs as they're written, never to be forgotten.

I guess this is why I maintain a closer bond to the art of writing more than the actual songs themselves. Once they're done, I feel like a surrogate partner in the arrangement. I'm happy to accept their fate as becoming public property. But gestation and birth comes with a wealth of very personal investment and parental care. The memory of which stays with me like a tattoo. Writing will always be my end of the deal, the bit by which I feel blessed. Recording is simply dressing the little blighters in readiness to leave the nest.

### **IN VINO VERITAS**

A title from the fertile mind of Fyfe Ewing. I'd begun session one of '555%' with another health kick. I maintained a strict regime of sobriety, extreme diet and daily exercise. A process I still regularly adopt in order to shed some pounds and gain clear focus. It worked great. For a while.

The title was born during one of these initial recording sessions at Doghouse studios in Oxfordshire (home of ex-Jethro Tull drummer Barriemore Barlow – the same place where Ritch and I initially went to write The Wildhearts' 'Endless Nameless'). While running the country paths every morning – successfully shifting a beer gut – I hit a creative brick wall. We were recording against the clock and I was still finalising lyrics and melodic arrangements for a couple of tracks. I seemed to dry up of inspiration. In sheer desperation, I grabbed a glass of wine from Fyfe, hoping to relax before panic set in. This was the first of three sessions, not a good time to run out of ideas.

As soon as the wine hit my system, the words – then sticking like barbed cables of thought – began flowing through me like verbal dysentery. This magic elixir had performed its ancient duty.

"Thanks mate, that really helped," I said to Fyfe with all the gratitude I could muster. "In vino veritas," said Fyfe, with absolute calm.

I'd never heard of the term before and once he explained its meaning, I instantly had a title for the instrumental we were to record the next day. A moniker that had been evading me for weeks. As soon as we finished the first session, I went straight to a tattooist and had the phrase indelibly etched into my wrist as a reminder that wine is a writer's companion and has remained to be since the birth of both. The pairing of Fyfe Ewing and Jon Poole's rhythm section is utterly terrifying in this song.

### **VERY, VERY SLOW**

This was shoved together during a taxi ride to rehearsals for session two. We suspected that we should record 31 songs just in case one of them ended up on the scrap heap – which one did. The lame duck came in the shape of the aforementioned 'After All You Said About Cowboys', the absence of which left a perfect hole for this harmless slice of hokum in which to reside.

Once again, I'm amazed at how popular this song became in the voting for '100%'. I won't pretend that I wasn't relieved when it didn't make the grade. Let's face it, people only like this song because it's short and fast. Which is the equivalent of

liking a movie because it features tits and swearing. I'd have been heartbroken if this had replaced something with actual meaning.

### **JUST ANOTHER SONG ABOUT SOMEONE**

Another one I'm very glad didn't slip through the voting filter. Written during the Christmas holiday in Lanzarote where I spent my entire vacation sitting alone in the hope of wrestling ten brand new songs from my imagination. I knew I had something special as soon as I began fiddling with this guitar riff. The fact that I could barely play the fucking thing only made it more intriguing.

I started using it as a finger exercise for a few days until a song took form within this groove. In it, I was able to weave a tale of my life before and after fatherhood. Innocence meeting a poisonous conclusion. The first instance of life baring its teeth like a beloved pet turned rabid.

I remember silently resenting my new family as they once again happily packed for the beach. Later I would welcome them back like a gleeful dog who, in their absence, had discovered a bone in the garden. It was ironic that writing about the absence of my old family led to discovery of the positive attitude that I enjoyed with my new family.

I played the song back to them and we all agreed that my day had been spent wisely alone. I still feel this to be one of my favourites of all my compositions every time I play it live, either alone or with a band. It was one of those times where everything finally fell into place. A writer never forgets those songs.

### **THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY MIND**

A pleasant enough take on a song. When originally demoed it was a very brooding and far darker proposition. It bore a Nick Cave approach as opposed to this far more polished end result. I think that making demos of songs can often spoil the process. Nowadays I try to avoid laying down anything more than an acoustic rendition of a song meant only for fellow musicians to pick up the chords.

At the time of writing and demoing this song, my head was a confusing place. My clean and shiny new lifestyle sat entirely at odds with a festering mind that churned over waste like a garbage disposal truck. With such a conflicting disposition, the song was hastily put to tape and left as simply another emotion successfully captured on Garageband.

The success of working with PledgeMusic brought a sense of freedom - something that felt anything but hemmed-in and claustrophobic. So by the time of recording the song again, I'd lost the original intention to distant memory. It wasn't until the difference was pointed out later by Chris Catalyst that I revisited the demo and felt the loss of something very special from this song. With the original sense of hopelessness missing, the song became little more than a polished curio that neither affected nor inspired.

Or maybe I'm being overly-critical of myself? I guess this song does help maintain a quality which is present throughout this very consistent 30-song album. Which

brings me back to my argument about mixing. '555%' represents the very peak of production values at this point of my career and the album was justifiably received as such. But listening back now, I feel very little connection with many of the songs – as gleaming as they undoubtedly sound. Especially in comparison to, for example, 'Market Harbour', which was an album that seemed to be universally panned as sounding "weird," yet to me is as appropriate as a sepia tinted wild west photograph. Like dressing an entire band in the most expensive finery available, not everyone looks great wrapped in Armani – regardless of the quality of silk.

### WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU

This is about leaving the house with a pregnant partner in heavy labour, knowing that when we returned it would be with precious additional personnel. This has to be one of the most fucked-up feelings known to man. Bringing that priceless little bundle back into what was previously a brick box – and nothing more – turns any building into a home. When it becomes the real thing as opposed to a drill, all the preparation techniques available in literature are meaningless.

Before his mother's waters even broke, Taylor's final days in utero were dramatic. A pigeon flew panic-stricken into the living room through the (thankfully unlit) fireplace while its mate was trapped somewhere inside the chimney flue, unable to be reached. For days we listened to its pitiful cries, as the RSPB informed us there was nothing that could be done. Finally we had to leave to go meet a little guy currently in his own confinement – our new baby. When we returned, the bird was obviously dead; the house was silent.

Even Taylor stayed silent for days, sleeping almost constantly. The house was transformed from pre-birth shrieking panic to a place of abnormal tranquility in comparison. Incidentally, this was the only time Taylor had been remotely tranquil in all of his hyperactive years on this planet, and we couldn't love him more for his beautifully manic behaviour!

'We've Been Expecting You' was intended to have a huge, full-fat production. Before recording took place, I organised an in-the-studio video Pledge update, featuring the studio musicians gathered on the floor around laptops showing YouTube footage of campfires whilst playing an acoustic version of the song. The resulting jamboree sounded so good that we kept it as a final take – which is what

you hear on the album. It was – after all – in keeping with the entirely spontaneous atmosphere that bringing a child into the world, the subject matter of this touching little song, is all about.

#### THE END

The biggest surprise of all the choices for '100%' was the omission of this song – written as the tail end to the album. 'Forget About It' being the most logical opener. For me, this will always be the song that not only ends the album and the sessions, but also many things that had been major factors in my life. It was the end of a lengthy era of uncertainty. The end of grovelling cap-in-hand to record labels for money. The end of worrying if I was going to fail as a musician. The end of the heartbreak of losing my previous family as I began a brand new one.

It was the end of the music industry as I knew it and the beginning of a new world where the fans controlled the fortunes of the musicians. This was something I'd dreamed about since being refused the right to make The Wildhearts' 'PHUG' into a double album. I'd endured so many hardships along the way, making albums on budgets that barely paid for the electricity, yet I'd always been fuelled by a need to document my experiences. This spoke to an audience. And this was an audience that had grown with me throughout the years, taking the blows thrown by their own lives, but knowing that they weren't alone. That I was there. That we were in this together.

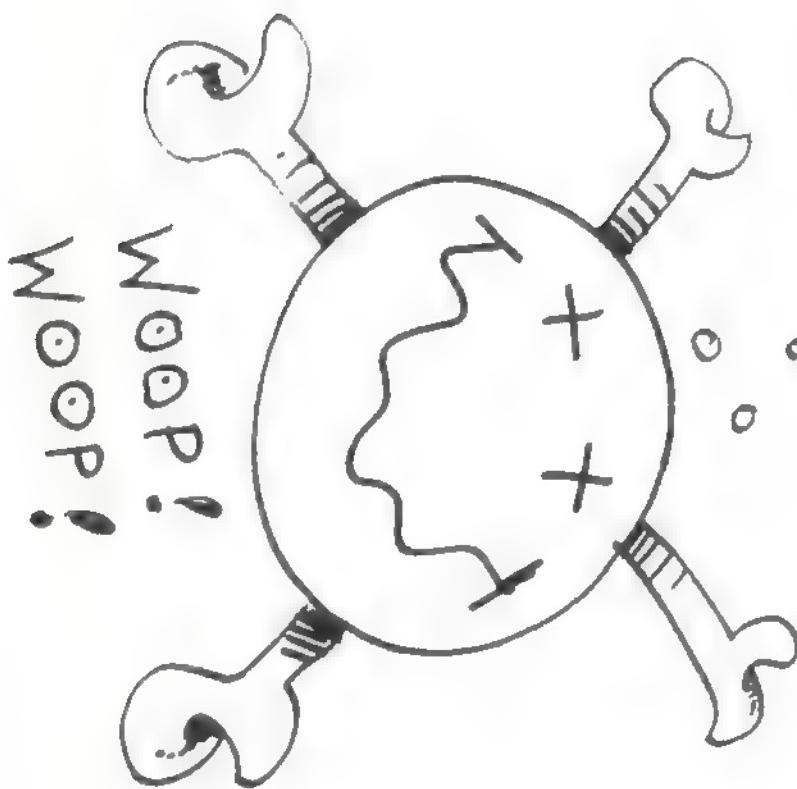
So when it came to the crucial time of truth, they came to my support and they saved my life. They saved my career. They fed my family. But most importantly, in the end they let me know that they were there for me too – every step of the way.

This end was truly a new beginning.

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2016

## Photography Credits

- 12 - Barn  
13 - Barn  
16 - Steve Gullick  
17 - Mick Hutson  
18 - Mick Hutson  
30 - Mick Hutson  
31 - Paul Harries  
32 - Mick Hutson  
38 - Beth Buttermore  
40 - Top: Paul Harries  
- Bottom: Mick Hutson  
53 - Paul Harries  
62 - Mick Hutson  
63 - Paul Harries  
64 - Paul Harries  
65 - Mick Hutson  
68 - Mick Hutson  
69 - Mick Hutson  
76 - Mick Hutson  
76 - Top: Mick Hutson  
- Bottom: Paul Harries  
82 - Paul Harries  
90 - Givvi Flynn  
91 - Paul Harries  
101 - Top: Jemma Whitford  
- Bottom: Vicky Peck
- 102 - Top: Paul Harries  
- Bottom: Gene Kirkland  
107 - Paul Harries  
110 - Paul Harries  
115 - Paul Harries  
117 - Gene Kirkland  
118 - Gene Kirkland  
124 - Ade Mottram  
128 - Ade Mottram  
131 - Ade Mottram  
133 - Ade Mottram  
135 - Mick Hutson  
136 - Mick Hutson  
143 - Paul Harries  
147 - Top: Beth Buttermore  
- Bottom: Trudi Knight  
148 - Beth Buttermore  
152 - Left: Shari Black Velvet  
- Right: Niclas Olsson  
154 - Paul Harries  
157 - Trudi Knight  
187 - Gene Kirkland  
171 - Paul Harries  
180 - Trudi Knight  
183 - Trudi Knight  
184 - Trudi Knight
- 198 - Paul Harries  
- Bottom 3: Trudi Knight  
241 - Trudi Knight  
248 - Paul Harries  
249 - Paul Harries  
253 - Trudi Knight  
258 - Trudi Knight  
259 - Trudi Knight  
264 - Paul Harries  
269 - Shari Black Velvet  
276 - Trudi Knight  
277 - Trudi Knight  
279 - Andy Rothwell  
287 - Paul Harries



